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The flux within the form

Larzer Ziff

JOEL PORTE (Editor)

Emerson in His Journals
588pp. Harvard University Press.
£17.50.
0 674 24861 9

Ralph Waldo Emerson died on April 27, 1882, less than a month from his seventy-ninth birthday. At the time, he was regarded as America's leading man of letters, a natural resource who, even in his premature senility, was in demand simply as a presence. Like a monument, he marked the spot for Americans: "Here thought occurred."

The intervening century has not lowered his contemporaries' estimate of him. He has, it is true, been in and out of fashion, but force flows steadily beneath such surface currents. The young Henry Adams, unwilling to accept Emerson as an influence, none the less recognized that in his America there was a third power together with politics and commerce: it was Emerson and the idea that man caused history, could rise above his world and work his will upon it. Nor could Henry James follow Emerson, especially into the social barrens that surrounded his celebration of individualism to the point where the perfection of society was visualized as a collection of persons so self-sufficient that like the planets they repelled one another. But this friend of his father's was for James a force to be viewed affectionately. His American heroes, such as Christopher Newman, are unmitigated millionaires who regard the objective world as powerless to resist their idealistic wills, and when, in 1904, James mourned the passing of the America he preferred (as a place in the mind, to be sure, rather than as a place of residence), he in good part mourned the disappearance of the Emersonian tone.

Meanwhile, of course, Emerson had liberal followers. Thoreau and Whitman being the most prominent, who were to exert enormous influence, and bestirred those who both admired and yet were outraged by his cosmic optimism, such as Melville, to their greater efforts. Unsystematic and vulnerable as his thought proclaimedly is, it lies close to the core of Nietzsche and plays over the pages of Borges.

The Emerson who was of such consequence to so many who are consequential and the Emerson who continues to be of intellectual, moral, and - why should the term be avoided? - spiritual consequence to today's reader is to be located in the obvious places: first his major essays, next his poetry, then his lesser essays. Finding him there we find him in the place he wanted to be. If he says, as he famously did, "There is no history. There is only biography," he means to call attention to the fact that the real (which for him means ideal) life of the artist is in his work rather than the events of his life.

In another entry to be found in Joel Porte's selections from the *Journals*, whence, indeed, all our quotations from Emerson are taken, he writes, "The life of a great artist always is thus inward, a life of no events. Shakespeare has no biography worth seeking. Dante by how much he had a biography is so much the worse artist." It is this austere, Emerson sees it to the bottom: "As a good chimney burns up all its own smoke, so a good philosopher consumes all his own events in his extraordinary intellectual performances."

To seek Emerson's life, then, is from his viewpoint to seek it in his public writings, not his *Journals*. No wonder that from Margaret Fuller to William Dean Howells his literary contemporaries recorded great admiration for the living monument with whom they conversed and great disappointment in the impersonality, the "chill of potential disapprobation" as Howells put it, that informed the interchanges. No wonder that neighbour Hawthorne, who wrote novels, could spend hours in his presence with scarcely a word exchanged, or that the next generation, in the person of James, fled a scene which did not so much lack as positively resist social density.

To find a story which I thought I

remembered in Quentin Durward". Emerson writes,

I turned over a volume until I was fairly caught in the old foolish trap & read & read to the end of the novel. Then as often before I feel indignant to have been duped & dragged after a foolish boy & girl, to see them at last married & portioned & I instantly turned out of doors like a beggar that has followed a gay procession into the castle.... These novels will give way by & by to diaries or autobiographies; - captivating books if only a man knew how to choose among what he calls his experiences that which is really his experience, and how to record truth truly!

Such an objection to novels is an objection to participation in events that finally have no consequence for one; the characters' experience, that is, is not an experience for the reader. When you finish an essay by Emerson, its author implies, or when you finish assertions of the first person singular as representative man, assertions such as "Walden or 'Song of Myself'" you will not find yourself turned out of the castle to resume your humdrum life. Emerson's objection to novels was carried to nearly grotesque extremes: "I am at a loss to understand why people hold Miss Austen's novels at so high a rate, which seem to me vulgar in tone, sterile in invention, imprisoned in the wretched conventions of English society, without genius, wit, or knowledge of the world." "Knowledge of the world Mr Emerson," we shout. "What possibly do you know about that, moving in your orbit from rural Concord to provincial Boston and back again?"

But he is dismayed to hear us call Miss Austen's settings the world and annoyed that we would measure Concord's worth by its social life. His power and his terror are that the world, the apple he intends to bite, is the universe itself. When he was a puzzled twenty-year-old contemplating his future, he wrote, "I see the world, human, brute, & inanimate nature; I am in the midst of them, but not of them." He wanted to know what his world was in the face of this world. At the age of thirty-eight, he is wiser but no less ambitious in his concept of the world that counts: "For this was I born & came into the Universe from the Universe, to do a certain benefit which Nature could not forego, nor I be discharged from rendering, & then immerse again into the holy silence & eternity, out of which as a man I arose."

This is the world of Emerson's essays and poems, yet it is not so freezingly distanced from boy meets girl, man loses savings, loved child dies, old age terrifies, rattlesnake bites, politician betrays, friend goes mad, as the theoretical comments suggest. The uniqueness of Emerson's voice consists in his ability to maintain the loftiness of an ideal viewpoint which sees reality as Me in relation to Not Me, while at the

same time conveying the sense that such a view proceeds from a life lived in acutely sensitive response to the daily events which are both all that happen to us and yet do not constitute the world. He talks scarcely at all about the everyday Ralph Waldo Emerson; the "I" of the essays is "mystical thinking". Yet he imparts an awareness of limits - of the petty as well as the mighty obstacles to will - even as he moves above them. This mixture of explicit, abstract idealism and implicit, practical experience is a conscious rhetorical strategy, one description of which he offers when he says:

All men talk about themselves, for 'tis all they know, but genius never needs to allude to his personality, as every person & creature he has seen serves him as an exponent of his private experience. So he communicates all his secrets, and endless autobiography, & never lets on that he means himself.

While it would be too arch to suggest that Emerson's essays contain buried novels, it is valid to take the clue of his essays as well as the poems is that of an imaginative artist rather than a philosopher. As early as his twentieth year, he explained his choice of the ministerial profession to himself by saying that "I have or had a strong imagination & consequently a keen relish for the beauties of poetry". At the same time, he went on, "My reasoning faculty is proportionately weak". Theology, then, is the best choice. "For the highest species of reasoning upon divine subjects is rather the fruit of a sort of moral imagination, than of the 'Reasoning Machines', such as Locke."

When he left the church for the lecture platform, he did so the more fully to exercise his imagination. In essay after essay he imagined an America in which nature was spirit rather than matter, in which the absence of social forms was the enabler of self-realization rather than the inhibitor of the good life. Adam, he felt, was a creator when he named the beasts and thus elevated them into the area of expression, and he too was a creator because the act of creation is the act of imagining what exists.

From his late adolescence Emerson kept his *Journals*. It is diary, workbook, filing cabinet, social commentary, financial account-book. Because he was a brilliant observer, a fine writer, and a gifted epigrammatist - and because he was Ralph Waldo Emerson - the *Journals*, or to give it its modern bibliographical identity, the *Journals and Miscellaneous Notebooks*, forms the single greatest document of nineteenth-century American culture of more than three million words. Which should be published? And what, in the publishing, to do about the many deletion marks, additions - at a later time under an earlier date, or signals that the material has been or should be used in an essay?

Emerson's heirs - his son and grandson - edited the *Journals* according to their own literary notions and their sense of family privacy and Emersonian Olympianism, publishing selections in a series of volumes from 1904 to 1914. This series was followed by Bliss Perry's one volume of selections from it. *The Heart of Emerson's Journals* (1926).

Then, in 1960, modern literary scholarship having arrived at a state of mania distrust of anything less than everything, the science of bibliography having arrived at precise if infinitely fussy conventions for the presentation in print of all marks in a manuscript document, and the American economy having arrived at a point in which a surplus spill flowed toward the academy, the Harvard University Press with its board of learned editors commenced the publication of the complete *Journals*, down to the last penny in Emerson's budget and the most obscure quotation he ever copied or misquoted. In 1982, the project rests at thirteen volumes of marvellous material intermixed with the humdrum. The volumes exact not only a high pecuniary price from the purchaser but a high physical price from the reader. The thousands of pages are so profusely strewn with slashes, single brackets, doubled vertical lines, and all the other members of the family of diplomatic printing marks that to proceed through a paragraph is to bump the head, stub the toe, bang the shoulder, and bark the shin.

Still, there it all is for the specialist, and now that it exists the wiser economy is to value it rather than fret about the many kinds of cost it has exacted. Its existence in this form, of course, necessitates a sampler just as in its earlier form it necessitated Perry's selections. Professor Porte has met this requirement well, and since he is aiming at intelligent readers rather than scholarly letters he has swept away the thumb-tacks, projecting ledges and blank walls that envelop the words in the full edition.

Porte's principle of selection is totally sane. He cites the editors of the larger project: "In the first printing of the *Journals* we lost much of Emerson. The Montaigne in him was duly overshadowed by the Plotinus, the brooding doubter by the cosmic optimist, the private man in his freedom and infinitude by the public man in the confining garnishes of the gentleman." Taking his cue here, Porte selects passages that exhibit the brooding-private-Montaigne Emerson beyond his other facets. Even this criterion leaves him with a great deal to choose from, and nobody who has read the *Journals* in its entirety will be without a quarrel about some omitted favourite: still the book very well accomplishes what the editor set out to do.

The Emerson Porte arranges for our pleasure and edification is not a stranger; we have no difficulty



connecting him with the writer of the essays. But he is a figure whom we knew in outline rather than in detail, and it is nice to have him step forth from the half-shadows that used to invest him. An especial bonus is that this Emerson was the thinker of thoughts that did not receive full development in his essays so that in letting the light play on him Porte is also permitting a number of provocative but fragmentary ideas to breathe the air after more than a century of confinement.

The title, *Emerson in His Journals*, is chosen advisedly. It is Emerson, not Emersonianism or the Concord Sage or the Representative American, who is selected out from the thousands of pages in which his person blends into such other categories. Here we follow his troubled reaction to the person of Margaret Fuller; his witty exasperations with the pomposities of Boston Unitarianism; his broodings on the conflict between the demands of the creative life and those of social conscience, as embodied most strongly in the anti-slavery movement; and his relief for the mingling of thundering pieces and comic provincialities in the Calvinistic elders of his family. We meet Daniel Webster and Henry David Thoreau, Abraham Lincoln and Nathaniel Hawthorne. And throughout these pages Emerson indulges a witty scepticism which he slances or at the least reins back in the essays. The Emerson present here is not the "other side" of the public figure; there is more continuity than that. Rather he is to the Emerson of the essays as a brilliant student on vacation is to himself when back in school. Clearly it is the same person who is replenishing himself, but there is less mental discipline and less temperamental consistency, more of the mentally robust and more emotional venting. This releases ideas that are not to be found developed in the public writings.

An example of this, most apt for our times, has to do with notions of

I.M. Edgell Rickword, 1898-1982

Not all bad, stopping writing verse before
Friends' deaths can overload the rift with ore.

Or so I tend to think, as I this day
Hear that you're dead, myself past seventy.

When, more than fifty years ago, I first
Lit on your work, already you'd been cursed

(It seemed then) by the fickle lyric muse
Vailing the special beauties shown to you.

Still, all that happened was your words of praise
Thus limited, grew more precious through my days.

Though whether you were reconciled, dear friend,
To silence is far from answered by your end.

Roy Fuller

language. As is well known, in his published work Emerson advanced the idea that the natural world preceded the intellectual world and that, therefore, words are signs of natural facts. Even abstract terms, he insisted, can be traced etymologically to the physical phenomena which first suggested them. However shaky this may be as science it proved to be a potent mythology for American writers embarrased by an English language which they otherwise would have had to view as already owned.

When we look at the *Journal*, however, we find that Emerson mined more ore in this terrain than he was able to refine, perhaps because the refining would have yielded a metal which he was not ready to use. Others, however, will be interested in the ore:

Literature has been before us, wherever we go. When I come in the secret recess of a swamp, to some obscure and rare, & to me unknown plant, I know that its name & the number of its stems, every bract & awn, is carefully described & registered in a book in my shelf. So it is with this young soul wandering lonely, wistful, reserved, unfriended up & down in nature. These mysteries which he ponders, which astish & entrance him, this riddle of liberty, this dream of immortality, this driving to live, this trembling balance of motive, and the centrality whereof these rays, have all been explored to the recesses of consciousness, to the verge of Claret & the Némi, by men with grander steadfastness & subtler organs of search than any now alive; so that when this tender philosopher comes from his reverie to literature, he is alarmed (like one whose secret has been betrayed) by the terrible fidelity, with which, men long before his day, have described all & much more than he has just seen as new Continent in the West.

Here Emerson passes through the well-visited region of the observation that everything has already been written up, and approaches the neighbourhood of a much celebrated criticism of contemporary criticism, that of the first as third; that is, that since we perceive the first to have been first only after it has changed into the second and no longer is, the first is actually an idea that occurs after the fact of the second and so is third.

Natural facts are signs of words. Emerson never said this, but the strength of *Emerson in His Journals* that we are permitted to see this and other attractive examples of what crossed his mind on the presumption that his published essays may well stand for what lodged there.

Beyond any American, perhaps beyond any other nineteenth-century writer, Emerson combined a passion for the great writings of the past with a ruthless conviction that they existed only to inspire and were to be disregarded in any and all portions in which a voice speaking directly to the reader could not be heard. His insistence that writing be "alive" was very literal. He sought the flux within the form, and was interested in the form itself to just about the same extent as a therapist is concerned with the container in which water is brought. He was willing to have his own work treated in the same fashion.

Most of us, however, are not so able or so willing to separate the life that cinders from the forms in which it survives, and in 1882 when they buried Emerson he too had undergone the kind of conversion he deplored: they were treating him like a statue rather than a voice. It seemed an inescapable part of honouring him, just as today's academic considerations of his relationship to post-Kantian German Transcendentalism or to his Americanization of Coleridgean Romanticism are meant to honour him through resigning worth to his thought. No need to quarrel: worth is there and honour is due.

But the vitality of Emerson derives from the remarkable refraction of his daily life into the voice of his printed words, and there is scarcely a good reason for anyone who does not feel that vitality toward his essays. *Emerson in His Journals* presents moments in the life of the man before their refraction into the life of his work. It is a good book to own as well as being an appropriate memorial to the hundredth anniversary year of the death of Ralph Waldo Emerson.

Fancy footwork

Julian Symons

GORE VIDAL

Pink Triangle and Yellow Star: And Other Essays 1976-1982
278pp. Heinemann. £10.

We should be grateful, but not too deeply so, for the critical presence of Gore Vidal. He writes freshly, sharply, often vitriolically, especially when he is discussing some modern American academic approaches to Eng Lit; he has heterodox things to say about almost everything. To the other side: he seems often less knowledgeable than knowing, deals in generalizations that might sound good on television chat show, and chatters on endlessly about what he calls at one point with conspicuous infelicity same-sex sex. He writes best when keeping his eye firmly on an individual, Edmund Wilson, Isherwood, Leonardo Sciascia, Peacock; least well when trying to convince us that sex is politics, or that refusal to vote in an American presidential election is "the most highly charged political act of all", and that one day those who refuse or neglect to vote will inherit the earth or at least be in a position to change the constitution of the United States. Altogether, Vidal is a lightweight, but a sparky little fellow prepared to shadow-box twice his own size in the ring.

The best pieces in this collection, which is less self-regarding than the earlier *Matters of Fact and Fiction*, are the ones about literature, its critics and creators, that make up rather less than half the book. There is a well-conceived, unusually generous tribute (unusual for Vidal, that is) to Edmund Wilson, who "kept on making the only thing worth making: sense, a quality almost entirely lacking in American literature". Wilson's battle for sense and meaning has, Vidal thinks, been lost, the victors being "the ambitious English teachers [who] invent systems that have nothing to do with literature or life but everything to do with those games that must be played in order for them to rise in the academic bureaucracy". The sentiment is impeccable, we can all agree that we are against such villains and jackasses, but still it is a pity that the author does not name one or two of the critics he has in mind. There are no doubt admirers of what he calls the kind of serious novel that is strictly unreadable, leaving "the slopes of Parnassus . . . planted thick with the shallow graves of those gallant readers who risked their all in dubious battle with serious-texts and failed". Again one looks for names and titles, of those serious novelists and their works, but doesn't find them. Vidal is, it must be emphasized, a lightweight, and what we are meant to enjoy is strictly shadow-boxing. He's certainly standing up to somebody and giving them the old one-two, but who is it? The attacks look ferocious, yet in the end nobody gets hurt.

All of the pieces collected here come from magazines, most from the *New York Review of Books*. An article on Scott Fitzgerald's notebooks and correspondence says, with little charity and less accuracy, that Fitzgerald was "barely literate" and that "The Great Gatsby failed and that was the end of F. Scott Fitzgerald". It's true: that Fitzgerald couldn't spell, but in no other way did he lack literacy, and neither was Fitzgerald's two early novels, less than Fitzgerald's two early novels. Such slapdash generalizations are typical of the book, and so in a certain unhappily facetiousness. In the course of trying to show that Scott's sensibility was inferior to Zola's, Vidal quotes a phrase in one of Scott's letters accusing him of saying "that I was a fairy in the Rue Petaline". He comments: "The answer to that one is, stay away from the Rue Petaline." The word fairy, however, is guaranteed to bring Vidal out of his corner. He insists that "everybody is a mixture of individualism" and is full of praise for Christopher Isherwood's frankness in *Christopher and His Kind*. This essay, which cleverly and illuminatingly compares the early Isherwood reticence in *Idols and Shadows* with the portraits in Stephen Spender's *World Within World*, John Lehmann's *The Whispering Gallery*, and the openness of the later

autobiography, is one of the best in the book. Admirable also are the tribute to V. S. Pritchett's critical perceptions and the article about Sciascia, which places the novelist's work in the context of his Sicilian background and political activity, and sees both in relation to the deteriorating quality of Italian society. A piece on Doris Lessing's science-fiction makes *Shikasta*, the book discussed, sound an excellent candidate for the unreadable "serious-novel", but in fact Vidal calls her "descriptions of the undead dead . . . often very fine", and although he says that she has not managed to create a character of the slightest interest, he refers also to her considerable art.

The latter part of the book includes a good short article on Abraham Lincoln that might sound good on television chat show, and chatters on endlessly about what he calls at one point with conspicuous infelicity same-sex sex. He writes best when keeping his eye firmly on an individual, Edmund Wilson, Isherwood, Leonardo Sciascia, Peacock; least well when trying to convince us that sex is politics, or that refusal to vote in an American presidential election is "the most highly charged political act of all", and that one day those who refuse or neglect to vote will inherit the earth or at least be in a position to change the constitution of the United States. Altogether, Vidal is a lightweight, but a sparky little fellow prepared to shadow-box twice his own size in the ring.

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Making it old

Anne Stevenson

JAY PARINI

Anthracite Country
68pp. Random House. £5.95.
0 394 70454 1

The poems in Jay Parini's first collection *Anthracite Country* are recognizably American; their diction is American and their prevailing tone both nostalgic and serious. But they also reflect Parini's awareness of his non-American literary ancestors; in the first poem we are invited to compare the poets of Boston and Vermont with Horace on his Sabine farm. The poem is an epistle in classical style, conforming to the rules of iambic pentameter:

My friend, we follow in the Roman collier's way
in our own ways, not really farmers,
but paucers on the farm Maccenas granted.

Now weekly gossip flows along the wires from Boston to Vermont; the capital's alive, but Caesars in their private jets want nothing of us now. The mailman comes with letters to aggrue us, forms to fill, and up to cultivate the ground, protected by the barbed-wire fencing of our privacy. Unparoled, we groom this inward land.

Such neatness, such modesty, so fair a perspective on the not-so-very-Roman present suggest a companion with Hecuba, yes, but also with English poets such as Anthony Thwaite. An American classical tradition insists periodically, on an antiquity. In his introduction to the Penguin *Contemporary American Poetry* (the revised edition, 1964) Donald Hall remarked on the "orthodoxy" which ruled American poetry in the 1940s and 1950s: "an orthodoxy of 'symmetry' was being overthrown by more vigorous movements, inaugurated by among



The Mexican artist Mignel Covarrubias's impression of Harlem: reproduced from Jervis Anderson's *Harlem: The Great Black Way 1900-1950* (390pp. Orbis. £8.95. 0 85613 445 7), to be reviewed in a forthcoming issue of the TLS.

A passion for generalizations which will not stand five minutes' consideration is apparent throughout, whether Vidal is saying that "the tone of the Serious Novel is always solemn . . . irony and wit are unknown" (Bellow, Greene, Powell, Waugh?), or that the young in 1980 watch, discuss and dream movies rather than read novels, or that American housing has become so expensive that it is no longer possible for three generations of a family to live in the same house: One of the more strikingly ludicrous suggestions is that Theodore Roosevelt, Churchill and Mussolini were all as much journalists as politicians. Churchill? Mussolini? As

much journalists as politicians? Does Vidal mean it? The charming view of this and many other statements in the book is that he does and he doesn't. His generalizations and comparisons are made with a straight face but fingernose, cocking a snook at all those who are too solemn about history or scholarship or the novel or the fate of the Jews. And like all lightweights, Vidal relies on fancy footwork to keep him out of reach of the bristles who come after him. They may pack a tremendous scholarly or critical wallop in their right hands, but when the night goes over they most often find that it's punching air.

others, Charles Olson, Robert Lowell and John Ashbery.

Hall reasonably made a case for the co-existence of many styles, but it is clear that his own creative sympathies at that time lay with an irrational, surrealist imagination more characteristic of Latin American poets such as Neruda than of Emersonian pragmatists such as Frost. Hall may be disappointed, for it looks as if the wheel has come full circle. In Jay Parini America has a poet whose impulses are classical, while his matter is immediate and personal. It is the personableness of these poems that makes *Anthracite Country* so readable, yet Parini's firm control of technique is most evident in poems about his childhood, spent among the collieries of the Susquehanna and Lackawanna rivers in Pennsylvania.

Ironically (and lamentably for those critics who insist on the isolationist purity of American verse) the poet who seems to have influenced Parini most is Seamus Heaney. Here, in *Anthracite Country*, is the same deeply felt nostalgia; here are the stanzas neatly counted out on the page, dictating pulling against rhythm in careful counterpoint.

Since the title poem is perhaps the finest in the book it will stand as an example of Parini's skill.

The cult dump burns all night
unnaturally blue, and well below heaven.
It smolders like moments almost forgotten,
the time when you said what you meant
too plainly and ruined your chance of love.
Refusing to dwindle, fed from within:
like men rejected for nothing specific;
lingering at the edge of the town, unwatched
by anyone living near. The small oow
passes for nature. It would be missed.
Rich earthwood, glimmering
rubble of an age when men
dug marrow from the land's dark spine.
It rests all healing.
Its luminous hump cries conflagration pale.
If that last line, with its ringing claim
of available, is luminous hump, it's

Affirmations and ambiguities

David Matthews

ARNOLD WHITTALL

The Music of Britten and Tippett: Studies in Themes and Techniques
314pp. Cambridge University Press.
£24.
0 521 23525 5

Britten and Tippett have together dominated British music since the war. Britten, nine years junior but decidedly the late to Tippett's tortoise, made all the headlines until the early 1950s; the success of operas from *Peter Grimes* to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, followed by the climactic popular success of the *War Requiem* in 1962, established him as the seemingly unchallengeable leader of his generation. Since then, Britten's reputation has levelled off; while Tippett, who was highly respected, but considered "difficult" and capable of appreciation only by a minority, has leaped forward so spectacularly in popular esteem since the breakthrough revival of *The Midsummer Marriage* at Covent Garden in 1968 that the present status of the two composers appears more or less equal. Their joint achievement is immense: to single out only one aspect, the virtual creation of a repertoire for British opera. They were friends, if slightly cautious and respectful friends, for over thirty years: Britten wrote of Tippett's "spirit of courage and integrity, sympathy, gaiety and profound musical independence"; Tippett, in his obituary of Britten, described him as "the most purely musical person I have ever met and I have ever known". As composers they are in many ways complementary figures, so a double portrait would seem an obviously sound idea, as long as it avoided blurring the individuality of each or else exaggerating it to the point of caricature by undue obsession with similarities and differences.

Arnold Whittall, the author of the valuable survey *Music Since the First World War*, is clearly alert to these dangers. His approach is not partisan; he declines to play off one composer against the other, being, it would seem, an unqualified admirer of both. His method is for the most part analytical: he surveys the two composers' whole output chronologically, side by side, a few works at a time. His analyses are succinct and penetrating. Some of them are tantalizingly brief; this is almost inevitable in a book dealing with so much music, but I could wish that he had been as expansive on Tippett's Second Symphony as on the Concerto for Double String Orchestra, or on *A Midsummer Night's Dream* as on *Billy Budd*.

Whittall draws attention to some of the problems peculiar to twentieth-century composition to show how Britten and Tippett have responded to them. One of these is tonality; Whittall traces each composer's changing attitude towards the tonal system, as he puts it, "may still seem to many the most natural, as well as the most appealing, which man is ever likely to devise". He uses Schoenberg's term "extended tonality" for the freer language that both Britten and Tippett eventually came to adopt. Britten, more naturally conservative of the tonal, began with some experiments in tonal freedom but soon opted for a simpler, more diatonic language. Tippett's early tonal thinking was almost puritanically strict. In an article written in 1938, from which Whittall quotes extensively, Tippett suggested that since Beethoven composers have used the tonal system illegitimately, largely for the historical reason that "the tonal system is a highly polarized system. Modern people are not polarized, they are split". The recovery of wholeness, Tippett means, though he doesn't say so here, through jagged analysis - might be accompanied by a restoration of tonality's original force.

Tippett, in the liberating wake of his own self-analysis, proceeded immediately to put his theories into practice in the Concerto for Double String Orchestra of the following year. Tonality is used here with great assurance; the work glows with an intriguing fusion of personal and literary influences; and its troubled legacy of textural and production

works, or movements, as models: the finale of his Second Quartet, for example, is closely based on the finale of Beethoven's C-sharp minor quartet. Yet it seems to me that the more Tippett tries to get under Beethoven's skin, the less he is truly himself; for Tippett's free-ranging genius and his love of improvisatory flights are essentially opposed to Beethoven's tautness. In fact it is Britten - who may have rejected Beethoven in adult life but who in early adolescence was as obsessively saturated with his music as Tippett was - who is the more genuinely Beethovenian composer, in purely musical terms at least. Britten's First Quartet, for example, with its tightly controlled motive working and its masterly deployment of classical tonality, is closer to late Beethoven than anything else by Tippett. Britten's approach to sonata form resembles Beethoven's in its dramatic focus on the moment of recapitulation, as does his reliance on the triad (extraordinarily enough in the mid-twentieth century) as his most potent harmonic resource. It is, I would claim, by a startlingly fresh and moving use of the triad at a precise moment that Britten becomes so great, as opposed to a supremely talented composer. That moment occurs at the culmination of the violin passacaglia finale of the Violin Concerto, where D major turns to

minor and Britten's tragic view of life becomes crystallized (significantly the piece was completed at the very outbreak of the war).

Here is a crucial difference. There is an element of tragedy in Tippett: in *A Child of Our Time*, in the slow movements of the Second Quartet and the First Symphony (both affected by the war); above all in *Prinn*. But Tippett's nature, grounded in the optimistic humanism of Shaw, has always fought against a tragic philosophy: *A Child of Our Time* ends in transcendence, and in *King Prinn* Tippett wished his audience "to feel the old pity and terror and be uplifted by it". Comparison of the two composers' best-known operas brings this difference of outlook sharply into focus. The unequivocal pessimism of *Peter Grimes* was to be confirmed subsequently by *Billy Budd*, *Owen Wingrave* and *Death in Venice*; the sensitive outsider will inevitably be destroyed, not so much by the rest of society as by his own lack of self-knowledge. As Whittall points out in an illuminating discussion of *Billy Budd*, Billy "goes to his death with no inkling of the dark side of his nature . . . innocence is ignorance: Billy has never known the need, nor possessed the means, to discover the truth about himself." Whereas the whole emphasis of *The Midsummer Marriage* is on the

need for self-knowledge, and its real possibility. The compelling optimism of Tippett's music, as it celebrates the reunion of Mark and Jennifer, is enough to dispel any doubts we may have about the plot - that we learn very little about Mark and Jennifer as people, for example, nor that King Fisher is too much of a cardboard figure to be a convincing symbol of evil.

Paradoxically, as Whittall notes, one can imagine Britten's first opera *Paul Bunyan*, with its mythic background and its boyish optimism, as a possible precursor of *The Midsummer Marriage*; while *A Child of Our Time*, with its theme of the social outcast driven to a tragically destructive act, might well have led to a Tippett *Peter Grimes*. Yet it is clear that *Paul Bunyan*, even if the criticism it received had not caused Britten to suppress it for thirty-five years, was a false start. Its subject-matter was entirely Audean's, whereas in his later poems, though he never wrote his own librettos, Britten generally exercised a dominating influence over his collaborators, so that the operas become vehicles for his own preoccupations.

Britten's operas were not to pursue a wholly pessimistic course - *Albert Herring* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* are prominent exceptions - while none of Tippett's later operas is so unreservedly optimistic as his first. The classic tragedy of *King Prinn* - where self-knowledge, which brings certainty, comes at the cost of the cruel sequence of deaths, ending with his own, that a single unwise choice has provoked - has been followed by two more operas both of which are considerably more equivocal than *The Midsummer Marriage*, though both end positively, and with a continued belief in self-knowledge as a real solution to private confusion (*The Knot Garden*, or public confusion (*The Ice Break*). Britten, who remained sceptical of the individual's ability to grow to wholeness by his own efforts, turned increasingly to a Christianity as a possible unifying force, above all in the Church Parables of the 1960s. Their quiet piety and emphasis on duty are again in strong contrast to Tippett's visionary, ecstatic religious sense.

Eliot is a key figure here. As is well known, Tippett originally asked Eliot to provide the libretto for *A Child of Our Time*. Eliot's language had a great effect on this work and on *The Midsummer Marriage*; *The Knot*

Garden, with its "fabulous rose garden", is also partly modelled on *The Cocktail Party*; while the collages of *The Ice Break* recall *The Waste Land*. Tippett acknowledged his continuing debt to Eliot by placing lines from *Hamlet* at the head of *The Vision of Saint Augustine*; yet, as Whittall points out, Eliot might well have been offended by "the manner and matter of Tippett's affirmations" in this work, despite its links with *Four Quartets*. Tippett in fact has used Eliot, as he has used other influences - Shaw, Yeats - for his own ends. Britten on the other hand seems to have drawn nearer and nearer to Eliot's world view - this despite the polarity of their political attitudes - and was able to set two Eliot poems at the end of his life in a manner that comes uncannily close to the spirit of the poetry. *Journey of the Magi* in particular - which seems to me one of Britten's finest pieces - is one of those near-miraculous settings (like "The Splendour Falls" or the Keats sonnet in the *Serenade*), where it becomes difficult to imagine the poem without the music (I shall certainly never again be able to read the word "satisfactory" without recalling the way Britten has set it). The titanic ending of *Journey of the Magi* provides a perfect example of the questioning ambiguity that pervades Britten's late work. Here it encapsulates the dilemma - which was also Eliot's - of the man who recognizes the truth of religious experience but whose temperament (perhaps) is a barrier to actual knowledge of that experience. Between the idea and the reality falls the shadow. It is Tippett, the agnostic, anti-Christian indeed, who so often spontaneously provides the truth of what Eliot (and Britten) strained so laboriously to get to the verge of.

These random parallels will, I hope, show the value of Whittall's approach. His book contains the most substantial writing on Tippett so far, while on Britten he provides an essential complement to Peter Evans's major study. The obvious inherent difficulty in such a book, of drawing together the discussion of individual works into a synoptic whole, is not entirely solved here. But with the shock of Britten's premature death still felt, and with Tippett at a youthful seventy-seven still composing vigorously (when he has finished the large-scale choral and orchestral work he is currently engaged on I hope he will give us some late quartets), the final verdict on these two central composers of our time must be left to the future.



Stravinsky releasing Oedipus Rex at the Théâtre des Champs-Élysées, May 1922; from Igor and Vera Stravinsky: a photograph album 1921-1971 (144pp. Thames and Hudson. £10. 0 500 01283 0).

Passionate affairs

Harold Moores

JOHN TYRRELL (Editor)

Leos Janáček: Káťa Kabanová
190pp. Cambridge University Press.
£15.00 (paperback, £4.95).
0 521 23180 9

The fifth volume in the valuable Cambridge Opera Handbook series is the book on Janáček since Jaroslav Vogel's superb biography appeared in 1952. John Tyrrell has assembled the best of current (mainly British and Czech) scholarship on the great Moravian composer, Janáček, one of the true originals of twentieth-century music, was until the last decade probably the most underrated by critics and public alike. No Janáček opera was produced in Britain until the pioneering Sadler's Wells production of *Káťa Kabanová* in 1951. The United States had to wait until 1977 for a major opera-house (San Francisco) to tackle this work. But to the last few years record companies, concert programmers and opera-houses have competed eagerly to cater for the sudden rush of Janáček converts. The enthusiastic critical reception given world-wide to the new Decca cycle of Janáček opera recordings, has confirmed this breakthrough.

The avowed aim of the Cambridge handbooks is to attract the serious scholar as well as the keen opera-goer and record-collector. *Káťa Kabanová* makes an ideal subject with its intriguing fusion of personal and literary influences; and its troubled legacy of textural and production

problems. Written in 1919-21, it is an outstanding example of Janáček's mature style, an intense psychological drama where none the less drew from the composer some of his most hauntingly lyrical music. Dr Tyrrell's volume provides an admirable balance of narrative exposition and technical analysis. Three sections are of outstanding interest: Tyrrell's own discussion of the making of the libretto and Janáček's further refinements of his "speech-melody" techniques; an essay by the distinguished Janáček scholar and conductor Sir Charles Mackerras on the problems of orchestration encountered during the preparation of the 1971 revised edition of the full score; and finally a confirmation by the Czech scholar, Dr Theodor Sitraková, of the authenticity of the extended orchestral interludes rediscovered by Mackerras in a Brno archive in 1960.

Taken together, the essays by Tyrrell and Mackerras provide an unforgettable glimpse of Janáček's shoulder at his working methods. The composer, bruised by earlier unsuccessful collaborations with librettists, this time set about a daring and ruthless compression of Alexander Ostrovsky's play *The Thunderstorm* (1859). Remarkably, Janáček was composing directly into full score even as he was fashioning the libretto, catching, meaningfully in music, symmetries, combining characters and scenes, twisting others, everywhere highlighting the psychological drama usually at the expense of background social detail. In his score Janáček was piling down to essentials, taking extraordinary risks in his

orchestration, juxtaposing instruments in unprecedented combinations, striving always to reduce the density of sound despite the size of his orchestral forces. The results in *Káťa Kabanová*, and even more in later works like *The Glagolitic Mass* and *From the House of the Dead*, were utterly original. The Janáček sound, in vocal or orchestral line, is like no other, and suffused as it is with his irreplicable passions and underlying humanism, this music pierces the heart as few other twentieth-century composers have done. None the less the very originality of Janáček's musical and dramatic techniques invited the attention of well-meaning followers like Chlubna, Bakala and Talich who attempted to make the operas more palatable to audiences by re-orchestrating extensively and softening the harsher grotesqueries of score and plot. The task of restoring practical performing collusions which reflect as far as possible the composer's original intentions has fallen chiefly to Charles Mackerras. His essay on the preparation of the revised full score of *Káťa Kabanová* is a salutary reminder of the complexity of the restoration problem.

Why did Janáček single out Ostrovsky's play for operatic treatment? Tyrrell's explanation, including an essay by Cynthia Marsh highlighting the anti-authoritarian themes of the play, there was good material here to interest Janáček, but if there is any weakness in Tyrrell's volume, it is the failure to discuss in comparable detail the inspiration provided by the ageing composer's obsession with a young married woman, Kamila Stösslová, who was fully thirty-eight years Janáček's

junior. She directly inspired a number of Janáček's greatest compositions, notably *The Diary of One Who Disappeared* and the string quartets. At first sight, *Káťa Kabanová*, about a married woman caught in a loveless marriage who finds brief happiness in a passionate adulterous affair, looks like an attempt at wish-fulfillment by a composer. Few of the more than 700 surviving letters Janáček wrote to Kamila have been published in English, and a study of *Káťa Kabanová* would have provided a timely occasion to commission an informative article on this intriguing relationship. Just as Janáček's early operatic masterpiece *Jenůfa* (1903) was immeasurably deepened by the composer's sorrow at the death of his daughter Olga, so the lyrical and erotic intensity of *Káťa Kabanová* is directly traceable to Janáček's identification of his heroine with his beloved Kamila.

But for the serious student there is plenty of solid research in this volume, backed by generous musical illustrations and a comprehensive bibliography. For the opera-goer there are, in addition, a useful synopsis of the opera by Wilfrid Mellers, an article by David Pountney on "Producing *Káťa Kabanová*", reminiscences and reviews of early performances, a good selection of production stills satisfactorily reproduced, a brief biography and a survey of the opera's progress through the opera-house of the world. This excellent volume is the best possible compensation for the lamentable standard of critical reviews that greeted early performances of Janáček's operas in this country only two or three decades ago.

John Tyrrell

In the Greek mountains

Patrick Leigh Fermor

C. M. Woodhouse
Something Ventured
208pp. Granada. £8.95.
0 246 11061 9

The beginning of this life-story leaves the reader feeling rather balked. It needed an ampler run-in, a few quickening touches, at least, about heath and home and schooldays: Winchester, thought to leave so distinct a mark, deserved a mention in the text, though modesty may have prompted the omission; for C. M. Woodhouse's school career, which he dismisses as "a hissing education in the humanities", was a dazzling success. Perhaps, like a dethroned Bantu, he chafes at ritual scarifications.

At Oxford, *Something Ventured* becomes much more explicit. Maurice Bowra and Isidore Berlin briefly appear; Richard Crossman looms; Woodhouse's natural gifts, backed by application, carry him to further heights, and, though the exhibitions and prizes and double firsts are scarcely mentioned, a fellowship at All Souls seemed the logical conclusion. He was preparing for it at the British School in Athens when the war suddenly deflected his abilities—and as it turned out, the course of his life—in a different direction. He was a Gunner at Aldershot before long, and next year, after Intelligence training, he headed for Greece again as an officer in a British Military Mission "to advise the Greek Army". (It was to do. Our paths often touched.) But as the Greeks had chased the Italians across Epirus and southern Albania and almost into the sea, there was little advice needed and not much toil in our Grande Bretagne headquarters.

The author relieved the languors of sapientary staff-work by composing excellent limboes—not cited in the book—about the senior officers of the mission. A nice Brigadier Brunsell, for instance, "said: 'I have only got one skill! But I've got such a knack for my Aek and my Quack that my tactics will note than the Huns kill.'")

The German Invasion and flight from Greece were followed by the Battle of Crete; Egyptian fleshpots gave way to instructing at a secret, Beachcomber-nicknamed SOE training school on top of Mt Carmel (or in Narkorego) and in December 1941 Woodhouse was landed by caïque in German-occupied Crete. As it turned out, those rather frustrating six months were merely an apprenticeship to the important next phase in northern Greece.

Outside Greece, conditions in the mountains were unknown. But the single north-south railway, Rommel's line of reinforcement and supply for the Afrika Korps, crossed an enormous iron bridge over the Gorgopotamos river and its destruction, synchronized with the counter-offensive in the Desert, would strike a damaging blow. In Rustum Buildings, SOE's Cairo lair, plans were drawn up and parachutes and stores assembled; and at this point, Monty Woodhouse's narrative suddenly assumes the pace and the brio of a very exciting adventure story. The party of twelve was commanded by the demolition expert, Brigadier "Eddie" Myers, but a leading role in all that followed, thanks to his knowledge of the people and the language, devolved on Woodhouse. They would be the first Allies in occupied Greece.

On their first attempt, the planes had to turn back for lack of ground-sight. On the next, determined if necessary, to jump blind, they alighted on the wrong mountain, and misadventure began to dog them. The teams were dispersed, the explosives were scattered—villagers, mistaking it for fudge, swallowed some of the plastic—WPI communications failed; and Cairo's briefing proved hopelessly inaccurate and sketchy. As the bridge was defended, guerrilla help would be needed; but the bands recommended by Cairo were dumb or non-existent or very far away. The ELAS commander, the ill-fated, unheeded, and Valoukots, was hanging about in the fog—but, on the advice of his

Her letters are not quite an ordinary correspondence, but a deliberate record of the war years. They could not be posted, of course. Opa batch went off in 1915, hidden in the luggage of her English friend, Frank Jaeger, an English wife travelling to Switzerland

to stay on to foster the brittle concord and to urge and help the forces of resistance to greater activity against the enemy: the politics thrust on them were none of their choosing. The Allied Mission thus came into being almost accidentally and at first all was improvisation. When, after a year, Myers vanished from the scene, Woodhouse, a colonel by now, continued in command of it for the rest of the Occupation.

He has already disentangled this confused and dangerous period in *The Apple of Discord*. Written immediately after the war, it is a monument of detailed analysis and the most serious and indispensable of all modern surveys of Greek wartime politics. But the striving after detachment, the punctilious hunt for truth, the determination to test the concatenation link by link, surrounded him with caveats and provisos and impose a system of balancing alternatives which might seem at a first glance, but not a second, to cancel each other out; and this makes it, with the unavoidable thickets of initials and acronyms, a stiffish read. Now the present books tell the personal side of a story which the earlier was at pains to omit, and, full as it is of characters and episodes, it was well worth waiting for Woodhouse's account of the Gorgopotamos, as we have seen, surfaces at last; and I would have been sorry to have missed the dyed hair and the disguise of a visit to resistance personalities in occupied Athens. There was nearly caught while confabulating with an agent who was captured and then rescued. Inaccurate rumours of the near-disaster were bruited about, and at a halt on the fifteen days' trudge back to the mountains, he contrived to overhear his own *own* *fun* *and* *rejoice*. . . . There are many exciting moments; but the grim unfolding of events casts a growing shadow; and if, for all her troubles, Greece was in the end spared the destiny which the powers behind ELAS were planning for her, much of the credit must go to the author's perspicacity, resolve and skill. His advice, on a flying visit to London involving long meetings with Churchill and Eden, went for much. He did the

state some service; both states in fact. He took his com well; he was twenty-seven at the Liberation; and the next year was marked for him by the beginning of a happy marriage to a great-granddaughter, as it were, of *Rienzi* and *The Last Days of Pompeii*.

But Woodhouse's involvement with post-war Greece—at the Embassy, supervising elections and private and literary capacities—still continues, though, obviously, the pitch and the tempo change. His involvement with Iran, in Mossadeq's day, is easteriaingly told. But his time as Director-General of Chatham House, in spite of the travel and the encounters, seems to have offered too inactive a stage for him. He has had a long and successful career as a Conservative MP; yet one gets the impression that this, and his stint as a minister, might have appeared a bit humdrum in the end had it not been for the consolations of literature. There are some good stories—ironic, witty and well-told—but not as much gossip, indiscretion and comic anecdote as we always want. In these parts, perhaps, Woodhouse's rider with too tight a rein and one misses the spirited earlier canter and the occasional gallops. A

useful note sounds here and there; we have much to rue.

The consolations of literature . . . there is too little about this aspect. *The Apple of Discord*, disquieted by resurgence of misplaced modernity, is not even mentioned, and the *Book of Navorino*, and the recent and monumental *Capodistria* lag without a word. One of his best certainly his least-known works—*The Omen*, the Occupation and the resistance disguised as episodic fiction—has become a rare book and a reissue is long overdue.

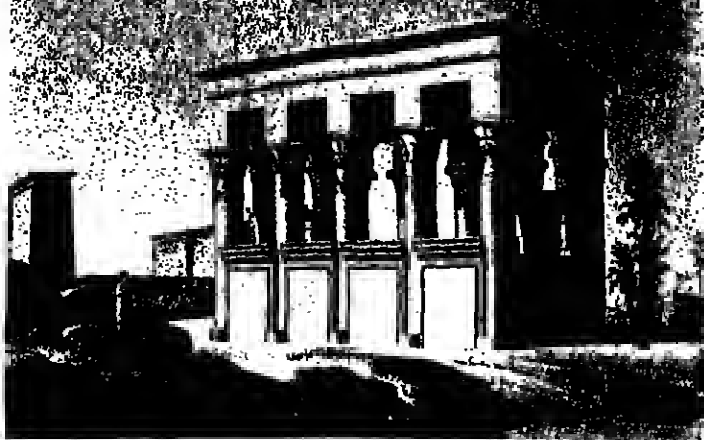
Alongside literature of scholarship, the other old love of Woodhouse constantly goes back to Greece: the bond, growing stronger with time, plays an ever-recurring part in the author's life. The last chapters, wholly unexpectedly, with a moving evocation of General Platon, the neo-Platonist philosopher whose life forms a bridge between the end of Byzantium and the beginning of the Renaissance; his remains were retrieved from Mistra by Spyridon Malatesta—their sarcophagus above his temple at Rimini—and the last of the author metacritically lays out a fitting end to his absorbing book.

peridically on leave from the Australian Army; three Germans: a journalist, a psychiatrist, and Sigmund Freud; and finally an ill-assorted band of Anglo-Saxon wives. They all were entertaining each other, with a good deal of food (and soap) was a parcel arrived from abroad—otherwise with strawberry-tea and biscuits and a grocer's potato. They went on food gathering; they went to the theatre (Strindberg was particularly popular); to the opera and to concerts; they read aloud, working their way through Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; and Karg-Ellert gave intimate readings on musical experiments and

By the late spring of 1918 the atmosphere is apocalyptic. "The symptom is a crime wave," "everything is forbidden," "you must have to break the laws if you know how to live." Austria has "ceased to exist." Germany's other "Allies" are capitulating; revolution is in the air; it will spread from Russia. . . . And what has happened to the "Kaiser"? "If you can imagine the Kaiser," members of the Salvation Army, "massed on the Golem tower, and waving heavens above their head, and waving to the good God to fall with a crash into the English Channel, you would have an idea of the atmosphere." The heavens are torn, *don't you see*, they are waiting breathless for the splash. . . . And three weeks later, day before the armistice:

My dear Emma! (I have seen the flag.) On Friday (I was by my bed) I lunch, and coming into the main street saw a dense crowd coming towards me and I was of it a great red flag. I was in a mood to say, "I am a Jew." As you know, I have been in it for weeks, but when I see it, it takes one's breath away.

Ethel's group was cosmopolitan. Besides Vas there were a Polish musician and his German wife; a Turkish musician who married an Australian girl in 1913; a Galician Jew



The "Kiosk" of Trajan at Philae. Originally from the *Dédicace de L'Egypte* prepared for Napoleon, this illustration is included in *The Egyptian Revival* by James Stevens Curl (249pp. Allen and Unwin, £8.00 04 74001 6). The temple has elaborate floral capitals surmounted by four blocks that were evidently to be carved with Isiac heads.

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But Woodhouse's involvement with post-war Greece—at the Embassy, supervising elections and private and literary capacities—still continues, though, obviously, the pitch and the tempo change. His involvement with Iran, in Mossadeq's day, is easteriaingly told. But his time as Director-General of Chatham House, in spite of the travel and the encounters, seems to have offered too inactive a stage for him. He has had a long and successful career as a Conservative MP; yet one gets the impression that this, and his stint as a minister, might have appeared a bit humdrum in the end had it not been for the consolations of literature. There are some good stories—ironic, witty and well-told—but not as much gossip, indiscretion and comic anecdote as we always want. In these parts, perhaps, Woodhouse's rider with too tight a rein and one misses the spirited earlier canter and the occasional gallops. A

useful note sounds here and there; we have much to rue.

The consolations of literature . . . there is too little about this aspect. *The Apple of Discord*, disquieted by resurgence of misplaced modernity, is not even mentioned, and the *Book of Navorino*, and the recent and monumental *Capodistria* lag without a word. One of his best certainly his least-known works—*The Omen*, the Occupation and the resistance disguised as episodic fiction—has become a rare book and a reissue is long overdue.

Alongside literature of scholarship, the other old love of Woodhouse constantly goes back to Greece: the bond, growing stronger with time, plays an ever-recurring part in the author's life. The last chapters, wholly unexpectedly, with a moving evocation of General Platon, the neo-Platonist philosopher whose life forms a bridge between the end of Byzantium and the beginning of the Renaissance; his remains were retrieved from Mistra by Spyridon Malatesta—their sarcophagus above his temple at Rimini—and the last of the author metacritically lays out a fitting end to his absorbing book.

peridically on leave from the Australian Army; three Germans: a journalist, a psychiatrist, and Sigmund Freud; and finally an ill-assorted band of Anglo-Saxon wives. They all were entertaining each other, with a good deal of food (and soap) was a parcel arrived from abroad—otherwise with strawberry-tea and biscuits and a grocer's potato. They went on food gathering; they went to the theatre (Strindberg was particularly popular); to the opera and to concerts; they read aloud, working their way through Schopenhauer and Nietzsche; and Karg-Ellert gave intimate readings on musical experiments and

By the late spring of 1918 the atmosphere is apocalyptic. "The symptom is a crime wave," "everything is forbidden," "you must have to break the laws if you know how to live." Austria has "ceased to exist." Germany's other "Allies" are capitulating; revolution is in the air; it will spread from Russia. . . . And what has happened to the "Kaiser"? "If you can imagine the Kaiser," members of the Salvation Army, "massed on the Golem tower, and waving heavens above their head, and waving to the good God to fall with a crash into the English Channel, you would have an idea of the atmosphere." The heavens are torn, *don't you see*, they are waiting breathless for the splash. . . . And three weeks later, day before the armistice:

My dear Emma! (I have seen the flag.) On Friday (I was by my bed) I lunch, and coming into the main street saw a dense crowd coming towards me and I was of it a great red flag. I was in a mood to say, "I am a Jew." As you know, I have been in it for weeks, but when I see it, it takes one's breath away.

Ethel's group was cosmopolitan. Besides Vas there were a Polish musician and his German wife; a Turkish musician who married an Australian girl in 1913; a Galician Jew

JAMES FENTON
The Memory of War: Poems 1968-1982
99pp. Edinburgh: The Salamander Press. £5.95.
0 907540 17 1

Accomplished poetry is as important in any age as the poetry of discovery, and often the same poet produces both, as Auden did. Like most poets of accomplishment he was expert in the use of inherited metres and stanzas, which became transformed in the powerful field of his genius and the new world it created. Auden is the supreme recent example of the poet who, in R. P. Blackmur's phrase, "adds to the sum of available reality". That reality is unmistakable, and the only thing like it in later poetry has been in the work of Lowell and perhaps Berryman. Their life studies were not in fact studies of themselves, any more than Auden's most hypocritically authoritative poetry was "about" the 1930s: both used a self or an epoch to create something quite different, more vivid, visible and full of meaning than life, or any one life, can be, but bringing us back to living with the sharper, educated eye that comes from participation in art.

Accomplished poetry does not educate in this sense; it gives an impersonal and external kind of pleasure. James Fenton, a decidedly accomplished poet, has learnt a good deal from Auden, and particularly how to handle the cryptic line or phrase that comes from the same HQ and suggests its whole ethos and plan of attack.

Lines such as "The bright conspirators were dead with their feeble jokes", and "fear the kerchiefed captain who does not think he can die", have the air of messages from that other self-sufficient and exciting world, which take the nature of its reality for granted. The poem they come from, though, "Prison Island", seems to have a more or less documentary origin in this travelled poet's experience, or perhaps his reading. It refers to adjacent Sicily and Naples, and a "fat Bourbon guard" who might have something to do with Napoleon at Elba; and, effectively, almost hypnotically, it conflates the experiences of the ordinary individual with those of exiles from the Mafia or socialist politics who passed vacant years away in the cafés and on the quays of Lipari or Pantelleria.

Such a synthesis is a major part of Fenton's accomplishment, but it does have the drawbacks of its own expertise. Auden's varied poetry was also brilliant at reportage, taking to China and Iceland, Ischia and the Brussels art museum, and making something of its own out of them, but Auden never fused together his own poetic world and the historic one he enquired into: the two remained scrupulously apart—as in, for example, the brilliant "Voltaire at Ferney".

Fenton's attempt to synthesize these different elements produces some interesting results, but it can also lead to a certain frustration, and disappointment for the reader, as with the two ambitious poems "Nest of Vampires" and "A Vacant Possession". These display all Fenton's remarkable gifts for evoking a place and a time, but telescope disparate experiences together so indulgently that the reader becomes bewildered. Cryptic poetry must have its own kind of absolute clarity (see Auden's "Dolly, Admiral, cast your fly") and these enjoyable poems of Fenton's seem too receptive to modern cinematic techniques for charming and baffling the viewer merely for the sake of doing so. Marlenbach is a place for accomplishment rather than a world for genuine exploration.

In an interview with James Fenton, these poems "create what could be virtually be endless fictions". That is very discerning, and yet such a fiction must not seem to know it is endless. Relations in a story stop nowhere: as Henry James knew, but this point is couched no more than the novelist from drawing the circle in which they shall happily appear to do so: Fenton is stronger in what has called this "found poetry", a static composition

The verse of accomplishment

John Bayley

evolved out of large and yet delicate quantities of semi-quotation, as in the poem "Chosun", which takes as its trouvaille an odd and heavily documented period in Korean history. "Chosun" is a pleasure to read for its curiosities, its lore turned into word images, as is another long poem based on stories, documents and atmospheres, "A Staffordshire Murderer". These show the advantages of what Fenton has called "the intrinsically interesting" in poetry: they also exemplify Brodsky's subtle utterance in his own long poem "Homage to Valia", "for certain purposes truth depends on art, not art on truth".

Brodsky, as he no doubt was aware, was saying something specialized, which will have a salutary meaning for experts, a dangerous one for amateurs. Art may create its own truth from a document, or an actual event, but it cannot afford to take too many liberties with the reality of its own world of imagination, assuming it has one. Fenton's strength is to get the external world of his travels and readings into his art, not to refine and enlarge upon a world of his own imagining. Two or three poems in this collection—"Cambodia", "In a Notebook", "Dead Soldiers"—give us a sense of the crazy wars in the Far East with a memorable style of authority which no prose medium could manage.

"Dead Soldiers" refers to empty windy bottles—"On every bottle, Napoleon Bonaparte/Plunder for the authenticity of the spirit"—but Pol Pot and his brother are live presences in the poem. "A German Requiem" commemorates the destruction by bombing in the lost war, when the name plates on streets and blocks of flats were taken to mark the mass graves.

So the squares and parks were filled with the eloquence of young cimetaries; The smell of fresh earth, the improvised crosses And all the impossible directions in brass and enamel.

The poem does not move, but that is probably not the intention. It is a record and a recording, taking as its epigraph the lines from Hobbes's *Leviathan* on how the past decays in living sense. Imagination tries to express "The thing itself", while memory records its decay, "so that the imagination and memory are but one thing". The past is remembered by the old, like the detail about the "directions in brass and enamel", but the sense of it has decayed, and to the young it has no meaning:

It is not your memories which haunt you. It is not what you have written down. It is what you have forgotten, what you must forget. What you must go on forgetting all your life.

And with any luck oblivion should discover you will find out that you are not alone in the enterprise.

The poet's investigations into memories of war and its horrors, whether near or distant, achieve in the verse a kind of impersonal authority. It

is characteristic of Akhmatova's "Requiem", or Yeats's meditations in time of civil war that the very virtues of the poetry distract us from its real subject: because the voice of the poet is so impressive and unmistakable the poetry is bound to be more about itself and its creator than its subject. It is paradoxical that an accomplished poet, with no special voice of its own, can suggest more effectively the general nature of war memory, the things "they do not say" which speak not to what the enquirer wants to know but to what he wants not to know. There is something equally eerie, repellent, and accurate about the Requiem at the end of "A German Requiem" (it was originally called "Elegy", a more impersonal title) of the old couple with whom the poet converses.

His wife nods, and a secret smile. Like a breeze with enough strength to carry one dry leaf Over two pavingstones, passes from chair to chair.

Those paving-stones help to make the poem, and are as potent in their numerology and phrasing as the pavement of the "dead patrol" in *Little Gidding*, or the "Uneven red

flagstones" in Ashbery's "Mareh-bilder".

"A Staffordshire Murderer" shows in detail Fenton's remarkable talent for the kind of conceit which Auden makes his own, but which here acquires a different nuance. The poem presents murder through the legendary clichés that secrete around it, as in old ballad poems where a "decorative cloud lingers at the gun's mouth", and then brilliantly kaleidoscopes these properties into a more contemporary kind of anthropomorphism, born from contemplating the detailed inhabitants of Lichfield's lock-gates and canal:

A cook hurries along the tow-path, like a Queen's Messenger. On the hell-pad, an arrival in blue livery Sends the water-bonnet off on urgent business. News of a defeat. Keep calm. The cathedral chimes.

Small activities as intent and natural as murder can also seem to take part in an unspecified threat. But Fenton's virtuosity again becomes self-indulgent in his nonsense verses—"The Empire of the Senseless" as he calls them, amusing though these can be. Diverting ton is the third section of the collection, "Letter to John Fuller".

Fenton is as versatile as he is honest: his poetry is notably lacking in any of the many kinds of sensitive cant current in the poetry scene. His independence is an important part of his achievement: the two will no doubt flourish and increase together.

Delightful instruction

David Lehman

TOM DISCH
Burn This
64pp. Hutchinson. £7.50.
0 09 146960 0

The reviewer who called Tom Disch "the finest intellect in science fiction today" spoke for a good many readers. Disch's imaginative and ambitious novels, such as *Camp Caucunurion* and *334*, seem to transcend their genre without betraying it; they manage to break down the barriers separating science fiction from "literature", and they do so by shrewdly manipulating the conventions of the former. The distinctive qualities of Disch's prose fiction—wit, invention, and the gift of the gab—are the virtues of his verse as well. Disch has in addition to a highly developed nose for the new, an excellent ear and a clever tongue. He is, moreover, as well versed in poetic modes and means as any graduate of Auden's "College for Bards", where the curriculum includes courses in prosody and rhetoric, the study of various non-literary disciplines, and the writing of parodies and verse essays as exercises in practical criticism.

In America, the ubiquitous writing "workshop", all too often amounting only to a literary form of group therapy, is the depressing reality. Yet we discover in *Burn This*—Disch's latest and, I think, his best book of poems—an occasion to revive Auden's pedagogic ideal as worth striving for.

All the findings of modern science Are to be found again in the long Linked, if possible, to appropriate myths. By way of saying, Hey, we're all in this.

Long poem together, ancient Greeks Staining of the same language. And Argentinean nuclear engineers.

The art of making, knowing, and judging is the subject from which these poems issue and to which they return. There is a "Tale of Two Metres" and an altogether lovely "Concise History of Music", an abbreviated version of "Song of Myself" gives us the essential Whitman transported to the twenty-first century: a book review in sonnet form combines its author "to forgive, at last, / And to forget *Reinvention of Things Past*", and a formal reply to Robert Bly serves "to deny / Your theory that plans prefer prose, / In my experience as a rose / I've noticed the best poems spring / From a light loam of metre and rhyme". But the styles expertly aped, the forms tried on for size, the conventions illustrated and sometimes subverted, serve a further end: they are pretexts for the imagination to assert itself. And Disch's imagination, equal to the occasions that his verbal facility contrives, accomplishes its self-appointed mission.

Seeing it done, I want to do it. Hearing it said, I want to say it. And I will make it my own. In a whimsical salute to Harold Bloom, Disch acknowledges that "there is no

and as within tantalizing reach. Like John Hollander's *Rhyme's Reason*, Disch's book delights as it instructs; and its practical value is enormous. *Burn This* puts its author's virtuosity at the service of verse as a craft, poetry as a métier; the result is a stylish and elegant homage to poetic possibility.

For the apprentice poet, whose appetite has very nearly been spoiled by a steady diet of confession and "deep" images, Disch can work wonders. *Burn This* offers a number of exemplary recipes. A "how to" scintilla discloses its ingredients: a tray of haiku *l'art d'oeuvres* takes us into its confidence; while at the next table an all-purpose model of the modern long poem "can swallow/Leviathan-like, smaller poems entire", and the obliging waiter spices the fare with a series of arresting similes. "The Long Poem" likens itself now to a movie, now to a friendly stranger with one too many Manhattan in him; it may be regarded as an urban goddess ("like the beautiful woman who first wore blue jeans / It is by its very indifference to what it might be / That the long poem must succeed") or as the proverbial lifeboat:

In fact, what is there one may affirm To mutual advantage? for in affirming anything

Do we not, in effect, declare our souls To stand in some provable proportion To the object of their affirmation? It is a kind of mutual advantage, a promise.

Affiancing, if not a marriage quite, a promise

To the sturdy world that we will go on existing On terms, which we have set forth, of love and trust, albeit With an eye peeled for predators and natural catastrophes . . .

Burn This was originally subtitled "and other Essays in Criticism". The omission is regrettable if only because the book does so much to revive this unjustly neglected mode. The verse essays in *Burn This* appeal to that line of writers from Pope to Auden and John Hollander who value urbanity, strike a balance between plain address and epigrammatic poise, and consider criticism as far too important to be left entirely to critics. Following Auden's example, Disch writes not for the reader as confidant but for a heterogeneous audience: his private faces feel at home in public places. To matters of common concern he responds with a healthily independent cast of mind. By the operation of sensibility on opinion, such verse essays as "The Problem of Safety: A Manifesto", "Literature as a Career", "On Science Fiction", and "On the Use of the Mosculine-Preferred" give a pleasure beyond their value as table talk—a pleasure grounded in respect for wit and words can do.

Let who wishes speak for himself By rules of his own reviving: The language will have its way over all. At last, Nor man nor woman, Nor marble tombstone can resist for ever Its flexible, inexorable laws.

POETRY: (top) 1982; (bottom) 1982

SECOND CLASS POSTAGE PAID AT NEW YORK, N.Y. PERMIT NO. 1000. POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE. POSTMASTER: IF YOU CHANGE YOUR ADDRESS, PLEASE PRINT NEW ADDRESS.

See if it done, I want to do it. Hearing it said, I want to say it. And I will make it my own. In a whimsical salute to Harold Bloom, Disch acknowledges that "there is no

John Bayley

On the inflationary fringe

Nicholas Rankin

JORGE LUIS BORGES and ADOLFO BIOY CASARES

Chronicles of Bustos Domecq
Translated by Norman Thomas Di Giovanni
143pp. Allen Lane. £7.50.
0 7139 1109 3

In "The Sartorial Revolution" (1931) Eduardo S. Bradford, dandy of the Neoclassicist movement from 1923 to 1931, is revealed as an impoverished fake. His millionaire's hat, horn-rimmed glasses, moustache, collar, necktie, watch chain, white shirt with set of imported buttons, gloves, handkerchiefs and boots have been painted on to his body. Even the moustache is a fake. It is Argentina that parades its banality beneath the Emperor of Europe's cultural clothing in *Chronicles of Bustos Domecq*, twenty satirical sketches by Borges and his friend and collaborator Bioy Casares.

The two men met through Ocampo's *Sur* magazine around 1931; they shared the same passion for books. Their early collaborations included a commercial brochure for Bulgarian foodstuffs, written in a week at a Pardo estate, and an anthology of Fantastic Literature, compiled while they were annotating Sir Thomas Browne. They wrote comic detective stories under pseudonyms: H. Bustos Domecq, *Parodi* (1942) and many of the characters from that book recur in the Chestertonian spoof "A Model for Death" (1946) by B. Suarez Lynch (not yet translated).

Originally written as pieces of journalism, the *Chronicles* were collected in 1967 into a book dedicated to Picasso, Joyce and Le Corbusier with an introduction by one Gervasio Montenegro, who recommends it as an indispensable, valdemecum to "the depth of the novel, the lyric, the essay, conceptualism, architecture, sculpture, the theater and the whole gamut of endo-visual media". An important index compiled by the "author" himself rounds the book off.

The *Chronicles* mark the apotheosis of H. Bustos Domecq from pseudonym to persona. The author of *Now I Can Read!* (City of Rosario School Board), once referred to in a Parodi mystery as "that man from Santa Fe who got a story published and then it turned out it had already been written by Villiers de L'Isle Adam", is now a champion hack on the pretentious fringes of Buenos Aires. Eight of the *Chronicles* are literary jaunts through the cosmopolitan groves of Parnassus. Ramón Bonavena's *nouveau roman* "North-Northeast" features the northern quadrant of his table, where a 2B pencil is brilliantly described in "only twenty-nine pages". For F. J. C. Loomis, the title is the work: "The text of *Parodi*, for example, consists solely of the word 'pallet'." Words mean what Santiago Ginsberg wants them to, not what Tulio Herrera's not scrupulously eschews them - along with sentences, characters, scenes, etc. Review a book? Hilario Lambkin Formento reproduces the blurb on the jacket, and ends by copying whole volumes.

The sketches are not all whimsical ideas inked to grotesque extremes, for something of Argentina glares through them. There is more truth than humour in the rise of mediocrity being chronicled in a language rich in around bombast, from the land where inflation became part of the economy only long after it was a birthright, a state of mind. Ironies turn into prophecies, or perhaps it is just that a blind man's vision is less deceived by age. "A Brand-New Approach" is about historical revisionism; Bustos Domecq asks "Does a military defeat suit a nation of patriots?" and replies "Certainly not." So-called "pure" history has become an act of faith, or honest revenge. "Mexico has thus recovered, in print, the oil-wells of Texas, and we here in the Argentine... have recovered the South polar cap and its inalienable archipelago."

The tone is characteristically absolute and comprehensive, perhaps even faintly manic. Arden's plays suffer from a tendency to go "over the top" (though he would perhaps contend that there is no "top"). And indeed in

H. Bustos Domecq began in the timelessly dated world of whodunnits, and *Chronicles* has mysteries that cannot be revealed here. The reader must find alone the secret of G. A. Barati's shoes ("The Brotherhood Movement"), the thing in Chubut sheep-rancher don Guillermo Blake's shed ("The Immortals") and why the last game of soccer was played in Buenos Aires on June 24, 1937 ("Esse est Periphi").

Norman Thomas di Giovanni's translation is in Continental American - "billboard", "boardwalk", "elevator", "mailbox", "mold" - which reads well enough aloud, but has not been revised for British publication. Borges and Bioy are not well served by careless punctuation and spelling. In addition, the jacket misspells Honorio while hyphenating and downgrading Adolfo Bioy Casares. The fame of Borges should not obscure the other, so memorably immortalized in the first page of the first story of *Ficciones*.

Chronicles of Bustos Domecq is conservative satire, the humorless of funny names and the avant-garde rendered absurd. Characters such as the architect Hotchkiss de Estephano, *gastrologue* Ishmael Querido and the sinister Dr Narbondio could almost appear in the newspaper columns of Beadcomb or Peter Simple. Pot-boiling, of course, but even the diversionary sketch-books of a master are interesting. "Addicts" of Borges's "jokes and puzzles" (the phrase is V. S. Naipaul's) will find irresistible fun in this book.

The sketches are not all whimsical ideas inked to grotesque extremes, for something of Argentina glares through them. There is more truth than humour in the rise of mediocrity being chronicled in a language rich in around bombast, from the land where inflation became part of the economy only long after it was a birthright, a state of mind. Ironies turn into prophecies, or perhaps it is just that a blind man's vision is less deceived by age. "A Brand-New Approach" is about historical revisionism; Bustos Domecq asks "Does a military defeat suit a nation of patriots?" and replies "Certainly not." So-called "pure" history has become an act of faith, or honest revenge. "Mexico has thus recovered, in print, the oil-wells of Texas, and we here in the Argentine... have recovered the South polar cap and its inalienable archipelago."

Falling short

Alan Hollinghurst

GRAHAM SWIFT
Learning to Swim and Other Stories
146pp. London Magazine Editions.
£7.95.
0 904388 46 8

Graham Swift is a young writer, but, as he has shown in his novels *The Sweet Shop Owner* and the outstanding *Shuttlecock*, he has an authority - of style, characterization, grasp on life - that is wholly free from maudlin self-exposure or faux-sophisticated self-consciousness. These concentrated, enigmatic stories address their subjects with such intelligent conviction and clarity that their ambiguities are not left to be stumbled on by the reader, but are challengingly displayed; in most respects unassuming (their world is suburban, impoverished, glamorous, unsexual) they are like James Joyce in the way they apply an almost scientific analytical cleverness to things in life which are forever vague, painful or imponderable. As in *Shuttlecock*, which disclosed how a middle-aged son investigated a crucially obscure episode in his father's life, Swift secures much of this authority precisely by considering how he and his generation stand with regard to the past, to the family, and to the pathetic awareness, which any generation is slow to gather, of the way their experience has occurred repeatedly through history. Swift's ideas, that is to say, are large, as is the revelation he wants each story to make, and the unembarrassed symbolism with which he achieves it; but his manner is meticulous, orderly and attentive.

Several of these stories are told in the first person, through a first person that can be neurotically unstable and therefore calculated and posturing. Married men talk of their professional and domestic lives in a tone that disconcerts by virtue of its very steadiness, a steadiness that holds psychological and emotional chaos at bay. "The Hypochondriac" is typical. The narrator is a doctor whose marriage has dried up, and whose wife then becomes pregnant. The ostensible motivation of the story is to explain the case of a young man who peppers him endlessly with imaginary complaints, of which he finally dies. After this the narrator himself has a nervous collapse. The doctor's whole procedure is one of analysis and

Subject peoples

Roger Owen

JOHN ARDEN
Silence Among the Weapons
Some events at the time of the failure of a republic
343pp. Methuen. £7.95.
0 413 49670 8

John Arden found it "embarrassing", he was to admit later, when the success of *Serjeant Musgrave's Dance* in 1959 transformed him into what he disdainfully describes as an "established" writer. He has in his day embraced the full orthodoxy of radical causes, and, to addition, waged single-handed wars with such cultural power bases as the Royal Shakespeare Company and even the ICA. Not for him, then, the warmth of institutional approval. Whether, after the relief of a period of relative public indifference, this novel, his first, will cause him similar embarrassments, remains to be seen.

His colours are flown bravely in the novel's dedication: "To the Subject Peoples - subjected, that is to say, to their own rulers, to someone else's, to us;".

The tone is characteristically absolute and comprehensive, perhaps even faintly manic. Arden's plays suffer from a tendency to go "over the top" (though he would perhaps contend that there is no "top"). And indeed in

diagnosis, applied equally to himself and to others - a professional technique which becomes analogous to the telling of the story; but the success of the story, and the contrasting failure of the doctor, depend on their falling short of the truth. The doctor comes up with a theory of individuals trying to fill their empty lives with levented incidents, fiction-making for the sake of their self-esteem. The theory comes to him with all the moving over-simplification which strengthens belief in the authenticity of such revelations (Swift is excellent at these moments of mistaken moral certainty). The theory has a seemingly inevitable and aesthetically pleasing symmetry. But beyond it, cruelly isolating it, lies the unassailable experience over which the story can exert no orderly reticulation.

The overall temper of Swift's stories is ungenerous; they contain no flowering of the finer feelings, and indeed the point is often to analyse for us the reasons why such feelings have become impossible. The language of ordinary relations is soured and deprived of joy, in the mouths of his story-tellers. "My wife" is perhaps the most sinisterly mundane phrase, conveying a chilling blend of fear, patronage and disgust, as from frightened minds that are fastidious and resentful. His sad, self-deceiving and intensely vulnerable people achieve their grave reality through the austerity of the authorial presence, which chastens moments of potential sentimentality into occasions of exact, undistracted vigilance. Swift's precision is a vindication of artistic pleasure in the description of a world in which opportunities for pleasure have dwindled away.

An astonishing performance of this kind comes in "The Watch", which transcends realism in its story of a pocket-watch which magically gives longevity to the possessor. Like Capek's *Makropulos Case* it actually embraces the pathos of pettiness of human experience by creating a character, or characters, who can survive through many generations, bleached of feeling or interest in humanity while becoming ever more interesting to think about. The Polish narrator, a later inheritor of the watch, recounts the incredible incidents in an operationally interested style strikingly at odds with the lack of feeling in the tale. Here the aesthetic control, and the recognition of a human desolation which is beyond expression, are memorably brought together.

Silence Among the Weapons there is kind of principled commitment to excess.

Like the plays it is crowded with people, or rather with types or "humours". The narrator is a Great-speaking half-Arab theatrical agent, a "fixer" from Ephesus, who with a bizarre troupe of fellow theatricals travels the Roman Mediterranean. They all become mixed up, at the highest level, with the political disputes of the Roman Republic in the First Century bc. There is a lot of action, marked by innumerable coincidences and sudden reversals. There is also a good deal of historical rumbling of the chicken bone-waving, wench-kicking, cross-scratching kind. Those who know the plays will not be surprised to learn that extensive use is made of song, quotation and postiche. There is a great deal of blood. There are, and there, more congenial and innocently pleasurable moments (parts of the novel are quite exciting), but the subject peoples should be warned that the author makes some tyrannous demands on them and they will not hard for small rewards.

The prose is colloquial, at best serviceable and unfussy. The main problems are a failure of narrative skill, and the density of the plot. Two early chapters which describe a theatrical or "showbiz" party are typical. As the guests arrive we are given a brief run down on each. The following passage indicates the overloading of information:

"They included another agent (cousin and not theatre business and therefore not a rival), an agent philosopher who wrote commercially successful books under an assumed name, a first actor from the municipal theatre, and a licensing officer from the town hall. . . . And, Shalderbone who introduced a Italian carer none of us had seen called Roscius, who . . . and so on.

After a great deal of this kind of thing, the licentious booze-up which follows is reported in stultifying detail. A is sick over B; C and D quarrel over E; F nuzzles G's breasts; H touches L; J goes for a pee. The dialogue, which seems to be assigned arbitrarily, is remorselessly reproduced.

The function of all this is to introduce the reader to a piece of political intrigue of some importance to the story. So the reader plunges into battles on, taking what small pleasures he can in the thought that people in the First Century bc were as awful as they are now, or perhaps responding to Arden's invitation to admire his skill as he transposes cultural chit-chat back a couple of thousand years. But in the end the multiplicity of speaking parts, even more tenuously printed on our minds that those before us, and the allusions to events already half-forgotten - all these make the tale thick and slow; the more so in that the overall political situation in which the action is set is itself obscure.

The novel is intended, one suspects, as an allegory, perhaps skilfully and similarly flat, crowded, brightly painted which Arden admires and describes as "essentially theatrical" and "emblematic". Like most of the plays the narrative is hissing, and plays the narrative is hissing, and the language and convention have characters, for example, in grotesque nicknames such as Stryczalee, Cuttish (or Jumpy). The intention is to create a subterranean world, the very separateness of which will reflect irreducible truths about human condition. Oddly, for a dramatist, Arden always tells us more than he shows, and this book remains something willed rather than achieved.

Modern Short Stories 1910-1980, selected and introduced by C. G. Gordon, was published recently (25pp. Durr, Paperback, £1.95, 0 460 01149 9) and includes stories by, among others, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Jean Rhys, Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, E. M. Forster, Narayan, Patrick White, Angus Wilson, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Francis King, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, William Trevor, L. P. Hartley, Graham Greene, Elizabeth Taylor and Mackay Brown.

The voice of childhood and great age

George Craig

SAMUEL BECKETT
III Seen III Said
Translated from French by the author
59pp. John Calder. £4.95.
0 7145 3895 7
Malvern edit
76pp. Paris: Minuit.
Three Occasional Pieces
32pp. Faber. £1.25.
0 571 11800 3

With every new thing that Samuel Beckett has written there has been the temptation to say "Here at last is the real Beckett: this is where it was all leading." That has allowed one again and again the retrospect needed in order to set out the true configuration of his work, to get his measure - in short, to have done with him. Until, unfortunately (can the man not take a hint?), more words of his arrive and we have to go through the process again. And now there is the awkward, obtrusive presence of *Mol vu mal dit*, which he has translated as *III Seen III Said*. Is there to be no end to it?

The design of *III Seen III Said* faces us once again with a mixture of the familiar and the strange. Ostensibly, an unnamed narrator strains to catch the detail of movement and appearance of an old woman in the final conduct of her last, solitary days, or rather ("What is the word? What the wrong word?") her end of days ("Night. When not evening night.")

Sitting, kneeling or lying still in her bed, he is not moving erratically across stony pastureland to visit a tomb, hypercane, now vestigial, now fiercely scrutinized, is at all points under an assumed name, a first actor from the municipal theatre, and a licensing officer from the town hall. . . . And, Shalderbone who introduced a Italian carer none of us had seen called Roscius, who . . . and so on.

After a great deal of this kind of thing, the licentious booze-up which follows is reported in stultifying detail. A is sick over B; C and D quarrel over E; F nuzzles G's breasts; H touches L; J goes for a pee. The dialogue, which seems to be assigned arbitrarily, is remorselessly reproduced.

The function of all this is to introduce the reader to a piece of political intrigue of some importance to the story. So the reader plunges into battles on, taking what small pleasures he can in the thought that people in the First Century bc were as awful as they are now, or perhaps responding to Arden's invitation to admire his skill as he transposes cultural chit-chat back a couple of thousand years. But in the end the multiplicity of speaking parts, even more tenuously printed on our minds that those before us, and the allusions to events already half-forgotten - all these make the tale thick and slow; the more so in that the overall political situation in which the action is set is itself obscure.

The novel is intended, one suspects, as an allegory, perhaps skilfully and similarly flat, crowded, brightly painted which Arden admires and describes as "essentially theatrical" and "emblematic". Like most of the plays the narrative is hissing, and plays the narrative is hissing, and the language and convention have characters, for example, in grotesque nicknames such as Stryczalee, Cuttish (or Jumpy). The intention is to create a subterranean world, the very separateness of which will reflect irreducible truths about human condition. Oddly, for a dramatist, Arden always tells us more than he shows, and this book remains something willed rather than achieved.

Modern Short Stories 1910-1980, selected and introduced by C. G. Gordon, was published recently (25pp. Durr, Paperback, £1.95, 0 460 01149 9) and includes stories by, among others, Sylvia Townsend Warner, Jean Rhys, Elizabeth Bowen, Graham Greene, E. M. Forster, Narayan, Patrick White, Angus Wilson, Muriel Spark, Doris Lessing, Francis King, Ruth Prawer Jhabvala, William Trevor, L. P. Hartley, Graham Greene, Elizabeth Taylor and Mackay Brown.

things, a purpose which was not literary only. No such conditions exist for Beckett. To write at all (to allow others to see the investment of the self in language) is extraordinary enough. To invest the self in two languages and not disavow either is - the phrase seems just right - something else. To start with the norms of any language are so closely tied to the relevant general culture that even the unchallengeable bilingual sketches in a different self merely by saying or writing "the same thing" in each of his two languages. For anyone not born to bilingualism, the joys, anxieties and compromises that go with the deployment of the second language are, quite literally, endless. And since Beckett has chosen not to recast himself entirely in his second language, that goes on being so. The early writings in French allowed (or forced) a break with limitless fluency, with the dangerous rhetoric (dangerous, that is, in the shadow of Joyce) of I can do anything-with-words; and at the same time the creation of a new verbal theatre in which to see and hear what might be done with words. And that in turn was eventually to allow (as a re-working of the relation with English).

Translation, however, cuts across these processes and brings a new strangeness. In translating into English Beckett has mangled the imaginative priority of the French texts and produced versions rather than new inventions. But these versions are astonishingly unpredictable. Here is a passage from *Pour finir encore* (1976): "Il portait vis-à-vis et souvent se reliait si bien qu'il tour de rôle ils avaient en marche à reculer. A celui qui la ferme revient qui sait le soin de gouverner un peu comme par petites touches le barreur le skiff." The French is most certainly idiosyncratic, but consider now the equivalent passage from *For to End Yet Again*, the translation issued in the same year: "They carry face to face and relay each other often so that turn about they backward lead the way. His who follows who knows to shape the course much as the coxswain with light touch the skiff." The Gallicisms seemed at the time to raise serious worries about Beckett's hold on English. And yet, within a few months, there was *That Time* with its utter case of movement. But when we come on to *III Seen III Said* we find, for example: "Any other would renounce. Avow, No one! For the comparatively ordinary 'Tout autre renoncement. Avouez, personne'. Here not only is 'avow' startling in a way that the French verb is not, but, without the indication of tense and function, mysterious where the French is not.

The point of these remarks is not (what would be grotesque) to give S. Beckett a low mark for translation. It is rather to suggest that, allowing for his respect of priority and his reputed distaste for the chore of translating, the signs are that he is exploring a verbal o-man-land where neither French nor English holds sway. The occasional Gallicism may catch the eye; it hardly matters when compared with, say, the appearance in *III Seen III Said* of the blithely charged exclamation "Eton!" when there is no corresponding word in the French - or in French. Or again, the rendering of the immediately graspable "Au delà l'inconnu" by "Beyond the unknown"; or, in "The Calmative", written nearly forty years

ago, the switch from the vocally demanding monosyllables of "les grandes chutes rouges du cœur" to the rhythms of "the great red lapses of the heart". Insertions, omissions, shifts of tone and association, alterations of new and old, ear and eye: even as the "chore" of translating goes forward, the writer's attention is turned inward, to the sources and resources of his own utterance. Elsewhere we find comparable experiment and discovery: the way in which the "innocent" density of stage directions is taken up in later writings as the language of narration.

This is, too, something more than either play or professional conscientiousness. The inaccessible linguistic explorations of which we see only the result are paralleled in the resolute withdrawal of the man, the closely guarded privacy. But they are also paralleled in that projection we know as the voice of Samuel Beckett. Because we can cast an eye over virtually everything he has written, because we can hear a thousand views about him, favourable and unfavourable, it is hard now to imagine a Beckett whom publishers ignored, who was known to a mere handful of people, and who already sensed the directions of his life's work. But it was this unknown Beckett, not the Nobel laureate, who claimed, in the nearest he is ever likely to come to a statement about his own art, "nothing to express, nothing with which to express, no power to express, no desire to express, together with the obligation to express". It was a still earlier Beckett whose first-person narrator concluded a story (itself called "The End") with the words "without the courage to end or the strength to go on." The language, you might say, of a dispirited old man. There are many more examples from the time before *Godot* and *Endgame*, but nothing changed when fame arrived. The numberless figures whom some, extrapolating from the text, have labelled "hump", "human wreck" or just "old man" have gathered round their otherwise silent creator and screened him, conferring on him "their" plights and purposes. So life and imminent or actual death. So the man who reveals nothing is there for all to read - like an open book. In a final stroke, great age as a defining characteristic passes back again to the personae, whether they are waiting for the end or engaged in foetal struggles.

The defence is complete. The explicit hopelessness of physical and affective cripples, the pervasive refusal and disgust, the identifying of language as both fatal flaw and torture: whatever else these have done, they have combined to conceal the relation of Beckett to his own words; and so have allowed him to pursue undisturbed whatever most matters to him. Indeed, if it weren't for two things, we would find it hard to do more than guess at the existence of some of the big things: the unremittingness of grief (pain and death centred in age) and the matterless variety, vitality of the writing. The second disposes summarily of the myth of Beckett as a gentle prophet of doom, the first continually confirms the usefulness of that myth for him. But, singly or together, they do not allow any breaching of the defence.

Here of course we must be careful. The private concerns of this or any other writer are just that, and none of

our business. Yet a nagging worry remains, led by the very consistency of the defence: why the insistence on age? There is a partial answer in the recognition that old age provides unquestionable justification for every kind of split: of memory from desire, of past from present, of self from other, of here from there. But there is another age in which we know such remoteness, dividedness: childhood, when the collision of fiercely opposed feelings - not only the obvious contraries of love and hate but those too of plenitude and deprivation, closeness and isolation - may just as readily as old age create a bleak and lonely place from which rescue can seem impossible except in death. Nor does "childhood" connote only a measurable span of years, since adults too are, when surprised by shock or assailed by certain memories, likely to slip back into early responses. Unsurprisingly, there are few child-figures in the Beckett oeuvre, and those few are at best marginal. But for someone who has so carefully elaborated as the frame for his writings a kind of limbo, a neutral, minimal space almost devoid of characteristics, it is astonishing how often the images, preoccupations and focal points of a highly particular childhood recur. The presumed great age of the speaker may seem to counter a respectable remoteness on these, but it cannot reduce their intensity.

The question is not whether the speaker is "really" old or "really" young. What matters is that Beckett has seen in the well-established mythologies of childhood, adolescence, manhood and old age a uniquely appropriate metaphor for the split self. With absolute certainty he identifies that aspect of ambivalence in which we live the awareness that being (and therefore doing) lie alien or in

the past, at a distance which is literally incalculable. The world - the place where a self might be, if there were a self - is elsewhere. This terrifying awareness he represents by setting the speaking "I" within the play of that ambivalence. The local representation varies: the part "I" may be before death or the need to decide, before or after sexuality, before fear or knowledge. This is the permanent other side of what is known as the realized "I", and only from here can Beckett write. Now there is no difficulty in accommodating the presence in the text of formidable brilliance, the crying of the lost infant and the obessional repetitions of the adult; for they are never part of a settled hierarchy. All is possible or impossible. And, as the real years go by, the part-selves gather more and more round the ground of earliest experience, like the twelve watchers of *III Seen III Said*. For his readers there will be, inevitably and properly, only glimpses, and then only of fragments, but they are important. The fascinated and unappalled attention to the solitary woman, hated and unforgettable, catches up a moment from *A Piece of Monologue* (in *Three Occasional Pieces*): "Coffin in its way. Loved one . . . he all but said loved one on his way. Her way . . . Trying to treat of other matters. Till half hears there are no other matters. Never were other matters. . . . Never but the one matter."

For us there is other matter: what quotation cannot reveal is the consistent vigour and inventiveness of Beckett's prose, which includes attempts to pin him down to this or that preoccupation. Perhaps, as they used to say about dreams, contraries are the best guides, and this is as true of *III Seen III Said* as it is of *More than Kicks*.

The defence is complete. The explicit hopelessness of physical and affective cripples, the pervasive refusal and disgust, the identifying of language as both fatal flaw and torture: whatever else these have done, they have combined to conceal the relation of Beckett to his own words; and so have allowed him to pursue undisturbed whatever most matters to him. Indeed, if it weren't for two things, we would find it hard to do more than guess at the existence of some of the big things: the unremittingness of grief (pain and death centred in age) and the matterless variety, vitality of the writing. The second disposes summarily of the myth of Beckett as a gentle prophet of doom, the first continually confirms the usefulness of that myth for him. But, singly or together, they do not allow any breaching of the defence.

Here of course we must be careful. The private concerns of this or any other writer are just that, and none of

Night Walk

Je eyes of strangers glimpsed
On the street at night
I see more than meets the eye
In the broad daylight

The circumspiced passer-by
Keeps to himself, and yet
He eyes give him the lie
At once when they are met

Samuel Menashe

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DENT
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to the editor

Arts Council Policy

Sir, - In her searching, if somewhat bolder-than-thou, review (August 13), Marghanita Laski seems too preoccupied with the possible contents of the book that I didn't write ("The Uses of the Arts") to summarize at all accurately the contents of my book.

In *The Politics of the Arts Council* I do not follow "the now common practice of assigning the Council's Literature Director for having said that the Council supported too much mediocre art", nor do I express any demand "for not judging high art harshly". Quite the reverse; I say in the book that the Arts Council's concern with artistic standards is neither rigorous nor systematic enough.

Nor do I suggest that the Arts Council should "get on with evolving a hit of soundly-based theory"; rather it is a bit of soundly-based policy that I would like to see clearly articulated.

Marghanita Laski tells us that criticism is more useful than praise and that the Arts Council draws on the most skilled advice available. If both these points are true it is bizarre that such skilled advice should be withheld from unsuccessful grant applicants who seek reasons for the judgments made on their work. The failure to explain its decision and to share the skilled advice that it receives are part of the explanation why the Arts Council has been lacking the authority and credibility that befit its status.

"One of the things this book shows is how very responsive to criticism the Arts Council is," says Marghanita Laski. The opposite of that statement is equally true. Although the Council has widened the range of its patronage as its grant-in-aid has risen, the weaknesses in its structure, assumptions and modus operandi remain roughly what they were thirty years ago. So do the strengths.

ROBERT HUTCHINSON,
77 Dresden Road, London N19.

George Eliot

Sir, - Two points arise from John Bayley's review (July 23) of *Peter-Hartley: Readings in George Eliot* by Barbara Hardy and George Eliot. A *Century* Tribune edited by Gordon S. Haight and Rosemary T. Vanardel. He writes: "Ladislav may well

be unfaithful to [Dorothea] as Lewes was to George Eliot herself". It is not clear whether this statement of Lewes's infidelity is John Bayley's or Barbara Hardy's, but it appears in the review as a statement of fact. It would be interesting to know on what factual evidence this is made.

In the review of the essay, "George Eliot's Bastards", in the second book, he writes that George Eliot was well aware of Charles Bray's "two illegitimate daughters, who were looked after and indeed cherished by his childless wife". In my book *Those of Us Who Loved Her: The Men in George Eliot's Life* (published by the George Eliot Fellowship as their contribution to the centenary year), I pointed out that only Bray's eldest daughter, Elleanor Mary (known as Nelly), was adopted (albeit unofficially) and cared for by Charles and Caroline Bray. I suggest that the "other" daughter in the Bray household was, in fact, the same child on another occasion. Charles Bray had six illegitimate children by his mistress, Hannah Steane (later known as Mrs Gryn). Hannah kept the other five with her, financially assisted, no doubt, by the children's father, Bray. The only other daughter, apart from Nelly, was Annie, born when the elder girl was five or six.

It has been suggested that Caroline Bray encouraged her husband to take a mistress and to have a child, since she could not bear children. One wonders why the "need" extended to six children and whether George Eliot, well aware of Nelly, was also aware of the child's sister and four brothers!

KATHLEEN ADAMS,
The George Eliot Fellowship, 71 Stepping Stones Road, Coventry.

'From Locke to Saussure'

Sir, - In her review (July 9) of my recent volume *From Locke to Saussure*, Rebecca Pomeroy remarks that Bréal's and Taine's relation to Saussure will come as no surprise to readers of the *Jordan-Orre Introduction to Romance Linguistics* (1977), referring to a footnote there on p. 294. I do not see that Taine appears anywhere in that book, and I am at a

loss to comprehend how it could be thought I was merely repeating something Romanists already knew about Bréal and Saussure. That I knew they have been related appears amply in my quotations. Except for one item (from which I also cite), the forty-five-year-old note is based on a seventy-six-year-old book that was published before many of the relevant primary texts. I deal with every one of the note's few primary texts among the dozens I use.

The note makes the most of Arsène Darmesteter's *Le Vie des mots*, but the Saussurean ideas attributed to it were earlier advanced by Bréal (who was Darmesteter's teacher). Its basic method and conception of the nature of language were rejected by Bréal, Saussure and Gaston Paris (a Romanist who was ever was one). Paris wrote a very critical thirty-page review, which I cite, and in it Paris cited Bréal and his own indebtedness to him on the main point at issue. Bréal's *Essai de sémantique* is cited several times in *Jordan-Orre*, but without any awareness that it is largely a collection of texts Bréal had begun to publish more than thirty years before it appeared in 1897. That alone totally alters the history Posner thinks *Jordan-Orre* took care of so well forty-five years ago that no surprises could be left. These seemed to me sufficient reasons not to refer to *Jordan-Orre*, which I have known all along. Posner surmises that my omission stems from the fact that I am, as he says, an Anglicist and not a Romanist. If so it is odd that I can elsewhere in the volume cite two of today's most prominent Romanists who have written on Saussure's background without any mention of *Jordan-Orre* and coming to altogether different conclusions, one of them being so bizarre on Bréal that I forbore mention. Posner illustrates the specialist's faith in text-book preface history, no matter how old and poorly informed.

Posner makes much of "scientific" linguistics and of my paying scant attention to it. For her, this studies language as "rule-governed activity, almost as if it were a self-propelling mechanism". I happen to be more interested in how the study finds such self-propelling mechanisms gets started, in intellectual history. The trouble with scientificism is that there are far too many versions of it and little agreement on subject-matter, method and goal. Good science does not have quite those problems. But does it matter? I agree with Richard Rorty that what matters about philosophy is that the conversation goes on, not whether it is scientific or something of the sort. The same holds for the humanities at large. To lay claims to scientificism is of little interest, rather like whistling in the dark. What matters is that things should be interesting and intelligent. On these criteria there will

be little agreement, but there is no reason to believe that some specialist should have the privilege of deciding.

HANS AARSLEFF,

Department of English, Princeton University, Princeton, New Jersey 08544.

William Harvey

Sir, - In reviewing Gweneth Whitledge's new translation of Harvey's *Generation of Animals* (June 11) Martin Pollock is clearly more at home with the subtleties of DNA than with the subtleties of seventeenth-century medical thought. He has played rather fast and loose with the term "form", so central in the medical thinking of the era. Instead of asking why Harvey did not postulate "a substance with the biological properties of DNA", he might have expressed admiration that Harvey had come so close to doing exactly that.

It all boils down to the meaning of "form", which in seventeenth-century medicine was not mere configuration or shape but an explanatory concept of great power. Deriving originally from Aristotle the concept was elaborated over several centuries by physicians such as Fernel, Riverius, or Sennert. Many different philosophical senses became agglutinated into "form", often expanded as "substantial form". The form provided unique specificity; it was the locus of qualities; it contrasted with "matter"; and, by definition, was immaterial; it represented activity and dynamism, concerned with development, generation, transformation, passage from the potential to the actual; it controlled organization and development; it was a real entity, although immaterial, and although indivisible, it was capable of multiplication.

These and other meanings are all implicit in the word "form" as used by seventeenth-century physicians who followed the Aristotelian tradition rather than the new chemical philosophy or the new atomism.

LESTER S. KING,

Department of History, University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois 60637.

'Perfect' Binding

Sir, - May I express my concern, both as a consumer and a librarian, at the increasing tendency of publishing houses to issue books in their first edition/impression in case-bound "perfect" (ie unsewn) format? One appreciates that, in order to keep prices within reasonable bounds, such impermanent bindings may be regarded as a necessary evil - certainly there is little harm where subsequent impressions or reissues of novels and other works unlikely to receive heavy physical use are concerned. But the practice has spread to the point where a library, say,

buying a reference work destined inevitably to be grossly misused and supplied with a sub-standard binding, is likely to be written off as irreparable in an absurdly short time. For example, it was acceptable (if regrettable) that later impressions of the first edition of the Concise Oxford Dictionary should be "perfect-bound" - but the new seventh edition?

Not wishing to be ungenerous, one must suppose this practice to have caused some soul-searching among quality publishers, but surely (given that sheets must still be folded into gatherings before cropping) books could be issued simultaneously in a cheap "perfect" format and a more expensive sewn binding? After all, it has not proved impossible in the past to issue the same sheets as simultaneous hardback and paperback versions.

M. I. CHISHOLM,

19 Westfield Park, Redhill, Bristol.

Evelyn Waugh's Early Writings

Sir, - The recent Dalrymple Press prospectus describes Evelyn Waugh's P.R.B. (the 1926 edition of his copies) as "the earliest and rarest of Waugh's books"; this is not correct. In our Catalogue 50 we listed, as item 190, "The World To Come A Poem In Three Cantos by E. A. St. J. Waugh, August 24th 1916". This edition was printed at the Westminster Press on hand-made paper and bound in blue cloth with white lettering on the upper cover. We reproduced the title-page in our catalogue from "Rev.xxi.1". When Evelyn Waugh sold this book to me he wrote (January 27, 1961): "It is a deplorable work written when I was 12 in imitation of *The Dream of Gerontius*. It is nicely printed, as you can see, by Gerard Meynell. I don't know how many copies were printed - certainly not above a dozen I think...."

GEORGE STANS,

Peacocks, Hurst, Berkshire.

'La Naissance du Purgatoire'

Sir, - Readers of R. W. Southern's review of *La Naissance du Purgatoire* by Jacques Le Goff (June 18) may be interested to know that an English translation will be published next year, by Scolar Press in England and by the University of Chicago Press in the United States.

JAMES PRICE,

Scolar Press, 90-91 Great Russell Street, London WC1.

"Author, Author" competition No 85, and the result of No 81, are on p 931 of this week's issue.

Among this week's contributors

JONATHAN BARNES is a Fellow of Balliol College, Oxford.

JOHN BAYLEY is Warton Professor of English at the University of Oxford. His *Shakespeare and Tragedy* was published in 1981.

ROBIN BRIDGES is a Fellow of All Souls College, Oxford.

GEORGE CRAIG is a lecturer in French at the University of Sussex.

TIMOTHY O'ARCH SMITH is an antiquarian bookseller in London.

D. J. ENRIGHT is the editor of *The Oxford Book of Contemporary Verse*, 1980.

PATRICK LEIGH FERMOR's most recent book is *A Time of Gifts*, 1977.

RODERICK FLOUVE is Professor of Economic History at Birkbeck College, London.

ROY FULLER's collections of poems include *From the Joke Shop*, 1975, and *An Ill-Governed Coast*, 1976.

ANTHONY GIDDEA's books include *New Rules of Sociological Method*, 1976, and *Studies in Social and Political Theories*, 1977.

ROBERT HAWSON's *In Anger: Culture in the Cold War 1945-1960* was published last year.

ANTHONY HOLDEN's *The St Albans Poisoner: the Life and Crimes of Graham Young* was published in 1975.

GWYN JONES's books include *The Norse Aethic Saga*, 1964, and *A History of the Vikings*, 1969.

KENNETH KITCHEN is Reader in Egyptian and Coptic at the University of Liverpool.

HILARY LANO is Reader in Social Administration at the University of Bristol.

JOHN HOPKINSON's *The Irresistible Diderot* was published earlier this year.

DAVID MATTHEWS is a composer and the author of *Michael Tippett: An Introductory Study*, 1980.

HAROLD MOORES is a specialist record-seller in London.

SAM C. NOLUTSHUNOV's *Changing South Africa* was published earlier this year.

D. W. PEARCE is Professor of Political Economy at the University of Aberdeen.

NICHOLAS RANKIN's stage adaptation of stories by J. L. Borges, *Arcturion*, was performed in 1980.

DAVID RIDGWAY is a lecturer in Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh.

JANIS ROBINSON is Wine Correspondent of the *Sunday Times*.

LARSEN ZIPP is Caroline Donohue Professor of English at Johns Hopkins University. His *Library of Theology* was published last year.

Preferences, pleasure and happiness

Peter Singer

AMARTYA SEN and BERNARD WILLIAMS (Editors)
Utilitarianism and Beyond
290pp, Cambridge University Press.
£20 (paperback, £7.50).
0 521 24296 7

Some ten years ago, Bernard Williams's "Critique of Utilitarianism" was published together with J. J. C. Smart's "Outline of a System of Utilitarian Ethics" in a volume entitled *Utilitarianism and Beyond*. The closing paragraph of Williams's essay went like this: "The important issues that utilitarianism raises should be discussed in contexts more rewarding than that of utilitarianism itself. The day cannot be too far off in which we hear no more of it."

Williams must have had second thoughts together with Amartya Sen, Dworkin Professor of Political Economy at Oxford, he has now produced a volume discussing the important issues that utilitarianism raises, in the context of utilitarianism. The volume shows that in philosophy and in welfare economics utilitarianism is alive and well.

This may seem a surprising conclusion to draw from a volume edited by two well-known opponents of the utilitarian view. Williams, in the essay just quoted and in subsequent writings, has expressed particular stress on the idea that utilitarianism is incompatible with personal integrity. He is concerned that utilitarian obligations may force us to abandon our lifetime projects and commitments. A utilitarian biologist of pacifist inclinations might be unfortunate enough to find himself obliged to take a job in a germ warfare research establishment, lest the position go to someone more zealous who will develop horrific new pesticides. A botanist roaming the South American jungles might be put under an obligation to shoot an innocent person, if he should be so unlucky as to meet a brutal police chief who tells him that if he refuses to do the dirty deed, many more innocent people will be executed. And so on. The idea is that there must be something wrong with a moral theory that would condemn us for deciding to mind our own business and get on with the legitimate projects and commitments that we have ourselves chosen.

Sen's objections to utilitarianism, developed in several journal articles that have appeared since his influential book, *Collective Choice and Social Welfare*, have focused on what is left out by a theory that aims single-mindedly at maximizing social welfare. Among the important things that are left out, according to Sen, are liberty and concern for the way in which welfare is distributed. In one oft-discussed example, he imagines a prosaic person who does not fancy reading *Lady Chatterley's Lover*, and is even more strongly opposed to the book being read by those Jewish people who would enjoy reading it. One such Jewish person, on the other hand, while wishing to read the book himself, wishes even more strongly that the prosaic would read it, since the prosaic would, in his view, gain more by exposure to such a different view of life. If we leave all parties to themselves, of course, only the Jewish will read the book, though if the book is to be read by only one person, both of them would prefer - and thus a social welfare theory would regard as optimal - the situation in which only the prosaic reads it. The result is, Sen maintains, a conflict between any social welfare theory, including utilitarianism, and any theory of rights which allows people to do as they choose.

So it is testimony to the fairness of its editors that this book is not especially loaded against utilitarianism. It consists of fourteen essays, plus the usual introductory survey by the editors. Three papers give uncompromising support to utilitarianism: R. M. Hare's "Ethical theory and utilitarianism", John Rawls's "Moral argument and the theory of rational behaviour", and J. A. Mirrlees's "The economic uses of utilitarianism".

The essays by Hare and Harsanyi have been reprinted in what is otherwise a book of specially written essays, presumably because so much of what follows refers, explicitly or implicitly, to their work. Hare is the most prominent defender of utilitarianism today. "Ethical theory and utilitarianism" has now been superseded by the more thorough treatment he gives to the same subject in his recent book, *Moral Thinking*, but the essay is still the best short statement of Hare's version of utilitarianism. His version differs from the classical hedonistic form in that it aims at satisfying preferences, rather than maximizing pleasure or happiness. It is also a "two-level" version, neither act-utilitarianism nor rule-utilitarianism, but a more flexible approach which distinguishes between the "intuitive" moral thinking all practical people must engage in, and the "critical" level of the philosopher, who has the luxury of enough time and detachment to ponder without presuppositions. Hare has put this distinction to good use in meeting some of the standard objections to utilitarianism, which rely on the intuitively repugnant results of critical utilitarian thought. On Hare's account this repugnance is neither surprising nor an objection to utilitarianism.

Harsanyi also defends a form of preference utilitarianism rather than the classical version. In this he is in keeping with welfare economics as a whole, for while economists find it difficult to cope with incommensurable mental states like pleasure or happiness, they think preferences can be measured by the theory of utility functions developed by von Neumann and Morgenstern in their *Theory of Games and Economic Behaviour*.

In setting up Hare and Harsanyi as the principal defenders of utilitarianism - a quite proper choice - Sen and Williams signal their view that classical Benthamite utilitarianism is no longer the leading version of the theory. This signal is strengthened by the fact that most of the essays critical of utilitarianism take some preference version as their target. If J. J. C. Smart had been included alongside Hare and Harsanyi the picture would have been a little different; nonetheless the book probably conveys an accurate indication of the current state of thought about utilitarianism.

After these three contributions by overt utilitarians, there are another four essays dealing with difficulties for utilitarianism, but in a manner which suggests that some form of utilitarianism can be retained. In this category I put Isaac Levi's defence of the theory against Sen's claim of incompatibility with individual liberty, and Partha Dasgupta's rebuttal of the related position taken by writers like Hayek who claim that any system of distributive justice must conflict with the rights of individuals to make their own decisions. Rather more qualified support for utilitarianism is given by Peter Hammond in his essay on the problems of uncertainty and incomplete information that face those who seek a utilitarian distribution of income and resources. The same is true of another discussion of uncertainty in utilitarian welfare economics, by Frank Hahn. Though Hahn finds plenty of difficulties for utilitarianism, he concludes that they are difficulties we have to live with, and do not constitute

an argument for some other approach. (Why this should be so is a topic I shall come back to at the end of this review.)

The remaining eight essays are all grounded in utilitarianism. Some use a broad range of fire that they mow down much else besides. Frederic Schick, for instance, finds a problem for preference utilitarians in deciding under which descriptions the consequences of actions are to be judged. Were the consequences of the appeasement of Hitler the war which engulfed Europe? Under that description the policy was a disaster. Or were the consequences simply the collapse of the peace arranged at Versailles? Then they don't seem so bad. If this problem really is insoluble then preference utilitarians are in deep trouble. Schick goes on to point out, however, that they are not alone. In one form or other, his problem applies to theories of justice like that of Rawls, and to some forms of egoism; indeed, it applies to any theory that takes into account the values that people place either on the alternative outcomes they can choose or on the choices themselves. In such good company, surely the utilitarian can find a way out of Schick's predicament?

Jon Elster, too, mounts an attack against a broad target; all theories that set as a goal some pattern of distribution, independently of the historical process by which it was reached. Elster needs history, he concludes, because wants and preferences cannot be taken at face value. They are formed by circumstances, and their ethical significance cannot be evaluated independently of those circumstances. Hence his title, "Sour grapes". If the fox thinks the grapes are sour, the utilitarian would normally count it as no loss if he doesn't get any - but of course the fabled fox only thinks the grapes are sour because he can't get any. This is what Elster calls "adaptive preference formation" and it is clearly something with which anyone concerned with satisfying preferences must contend. Can the problem be overcome by the requirement that the preferences to be considered be those of a person - or a fox - would have if fully informed? Maybe; but there are also problems here which, as Elster shows, need to be thought through.

Now we move on to anti-utilitarian statements that are more straightforwardly philosophical in character, and less concerned with the issues dealt with by welfare economics. Amy Gutman discusses the utilitarian approach to education, and contrasts it unfavourably with the way in which an advocate of liberty would approach the topic. The essay raises important issues, yet is a little out of place in a volume otherwise devoted to more basic issues.

The book includes essays by some of the leading philosophical opponents of utilitarianism. Readers familiar with the work of John Rawls, Stuart Hampshire and Charles Taylor will find few surprises in their contributions. Rawls offers an elaboration of his notion of primary goods which will be essential reading for those keen to keep up with the latest supplement to *A Theory of Justice*. I am not among this group, for I have never been satisfied with Rawls's arguments for the most crucial claim in all his work; that persons in the

"original position" would choose to do anything other than maximize their expected utility. This essay doesn't help. In trying to stress the difference between his own position and utilitarianism, Rawls writes: "In justice as fairness the members of society are conceived in the first instance as moral persons who can cooperate together for mutual advantage, and not simply as rational individuals who have aims and desires they seek to satisfy." But what exactly is this difference? What stops "rational individuals who have aims and desires they seek to satisfy" from cooperating for their mutual advantage? And why are such rational individuals not "moral persons"? I could find no answer.

Hampshire's writing is, as always, elegant; but in defending the value of convention against the consequentialist, whom he pictures as wishing to clear the decks of all custom and convention, he has surely fallen into the fallacy Bentham himself anticipated when he wrote in his *Principles of Morals and Legislation* of those who try to combat the principle of utility with reasons drawn from the very principle itself.

Hampshire's defence of moral claims of a conventional kind is plainly consequentialist: these customary prescriptions are in his view more likely to be respected than the deliverance of an abstract morality imposed without regard for traditions, sentiment, local attachment and loyalties. Since we need some moral principles to be respected, it would be a mistake to dismiss all customary principles. If Hampshire is right on the factual issue, so to some extent he is right; but, any utilitarian can accept his conclusion.

The sense of familiarity we get from Taylor's essay lies in his objection to utilitarianism as a form of reductionism. He would classify contract theories of justice along with utilitarianism as "single-consideration procedures" (that do not "do justice" (I don't think the pun was intended) to "the diversity of goods we have to weigh together in normative political thinking"). Why we "have" to weigh diverse goods in a manner that denies the kind of weighing up that the utilitarian would like to do, is something that Taylor does not clearly state. Though there are some suggestive examples in his paper, there is not much hard argument, and there is distressing lack of any attempt to come to grips with the obvious counter-arguments that utilitarians would put. The tone of the whole essay is set by the tense of its opening sentence: "What did utilitarianism have going for it?" Acting as if his opponent were dead, he considers it beneath his dignity to flag it; but such a stance is out of place in a volume which plainly indicates that the beast is alive and kicking.

So we come to the only philosophical essay in this collection that adds something new and significant to the opposition to utilitarianism: T. M. Scanlon's "Contractualism and utilitarianism".

I confess that I began the essay without great hopes; the title had led me to expect yet another comparison between utilitarianism and Rawls's theory of justice. Scanlon goes deeper than Rawls, however, for he has noticed that utilitarianism draws much of its strength from the contrast between its own commonsensical foundation - the obvious moral significance of the well-being of individuals - and the more obscure foundations of rival views. Hence he sets out to sap this source of strength by providing a clear account of the foundations of non-utilitarian moral reasoning. If he does not quite manage this within the twenty-five pages he takes up, he does enough to show that there is a promising contractualist alternative to the basis of moral reasoning relied upon in different ways by utilitarians such as Hare and Harsanyi.

Scanlon's contractualist alternative bases the idea of morality in a system of rules for the general regulation of behaviour which no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general

agreement. The basis of moral motivation, on this view, becomes the desire to be able to justify our actions to others on grounds they could reasonably accept. Like the philosophical approach of the utilitarians, this contractualist view has no need to appeal to any mysterious objective moral properties existing in the world independently of us.

So far, so good; but for all its deeper insight into the fundamental issues, Scanlon's contractualist foundation must face the problem that Rawls's theory of justice has, in my view, been unable to surmount - the problem of showing that the normative outcome of this foundation is not, after all, a form of utilitarianism. Why is utilitarianism not itself "a system of rules for the general regulation of behaviour which no one could reasonably reject as a basis for informed, unforced general agreement"? Indeed, since there is an obvious reason for rejecting any non-utilitarian system of rules - namely, that it results in less happiness than might otherwise be achieved - why is not utilitarianism the only system of rules which no one could reasonably reject?

Perhaps that is putting the utilitarian case too strongly; but it shows the task Scanlon must face. By giving a very strict and literal definition of "act utilitarianism", he offers a plausible reason for believing that that particular version is unlikely to result from the contractualist foundation. Some kind of "two-level" utilitarianism like Hare's, however, he admits to be a more probable candidate; and although in the end he rejects this possibility, he would be the first to admit that there is more to be said here. I hope Scanlon is planning to say more, preferably at book-length.

I shall conclude with two general reflections. First, the idea of a book on utilitarianism co-edited by a distinguished economist and a distinguished philosopher must have seemed a good one at the time. Discussions of utilitarianism are central to both ethics and welfare economics, and in recent years there has been contact between the two disciplines. Yet the approaches are still very different, and in this book economist continues to write with fellow-economist principally in mind, and philosopher with fellow-philosopher. Naturally, as a philosopher, I found the economic approach less than adequate. When they are bold, like Harsanyi, the economists are philosophically crude; when they adopt proper academic caution they become mathematically precise about matters so abstract that their conclusions are tautologies. That is an oversimplification, of course; philosophers do have something to learn from the essays by economists in this book, though they will learn it at some cost in tedious. But what would an economist reviewing this book say of the philosophical approach to utilitarianism? That it lacks rigour and precision? Perhaps; I cannot distance myself enough from my own discipline to be sure.

Second, why does utilitarianism continue to survive? As I have already said, I found Scanlon's essay illuminating this topic more than any other. But there is also insight to be gleaned from something Taylor says: "The modern dispute about utilitarianism is not about whether it occupies some of the space of moral reason, but whether it fills the whole space." That remark explains why Hahn concludes that, notwithstanding the difficulties he finds with utilitarianism, they do not constitute an argument for another approach. For many of the difficulties with utilitarianism found in this volume are equally difficulties for any view which gives any weight to an assessment of the consequences of our decisions on the preferences of individuals; and as Taylor indicates, no plausible view can deny some weight to these consequences. Hence the troubles utilitarianism must confront are troubles we cannot escape, wherever we turn. There is no alternative but to tackle them as best we can. That is why utilitarianism will be on the agenda of philosophers and economists for a long time.

Simon Rae

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In a Different Voice

Psychological Theory and Women's Development

Carol Gilligan

Published June 1982, £10.50

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Buried evidence

David Ridgway

ROBERT CHAPMAN, IAN KINNES and KLAUS RANDBORG (Editors)
The Archaeology of Death
159pp. Cambridge University Press.
£17.50.
0 521 23775 0

The excavation of tombs has always presented the archaeologist with the pleasing prospect of a good return on a comparatively small investment of money and time. For the non-clandestine excavator, the investigation of funerary sites possesses the additional attraction of revealing ancient contexts that are patently the result of conscious ancient decisions: Stuart Piggott's famous definition of archaeology as the science of rubbish applies to settlement sites – not cemeteries. In many areas and periods, tombs and their contents still provide the most informative material evidence for chronology, life expectancy, disease, physical appearance, dress (or at least the fashion in shrouds), ethnic identity, social stratification, craftsmanship and – however paradoxically – the quality of life in general.

The editorial (and longest) chapter of *The Archaeology of Death* is prefaced by a line remembered from the Undertaker's sketch in *Monty Python's Flying Circus*, and tells us that "archaeologists need a body of theory in order to relate the mortuary data at their disposal to patterns of human behaviour within past human societies". In other words, here is a textbook of mortuary systems, appropriately rendered as unappealing to the eye as possible. The pages are large, and the text is crammed onto them in two columns of small print set close together with unjustified right-hand margins.

Chapters Two to Ten build up the body of theory promised in Chapter One by means of worked examples. James A. Brown (Evanston, Illinois) examines three cases from the eastern United States: the Spiro and Harlan phases of the Caddoan area; and the Klunk and Gibson sites of the Hopewellian period (AD 1200–1400; AD 1000–1200; 110 BC–AD 400). He lists the pitfalls that await the archaeologist who seeks to rank prehistoric burials:

(1) The apical social order may be missed... relative differences are important... different locations will be used to mark out status differences. (2) Symbols of authority may not be identified... Investigators must be particularly alert to emblems of rank such as costume (particularly head-dresses), elaborated weapons and other artefacts with ritual connections of great power. (3) Complex burial processes may create false impressions of disposal programmes. Care must be exercised in interpreting the complexities of the burial programme, lest different phases or stages in burial processing be mistaken for different statuses.

Following detailed analysis of five cemetery sites dating from the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries on the Central Plains of North America, for which the ethnic identity and biographical structure are known ethnographically, John O'Shea (Iowa) suggests that social perceptions derived from mortuary remains "may be distorted, but distorted in a regular and predictable manner". Lynne Goldstein (Milwaukee) extends fashionable concepts of spatial organization to mortuary analysis, represented by two cemeteries in the Mississippian cultural system (AD 900–1400). Her conclusions include the statement that "The spatial component, when used as a framework for examining the results of 'subculture language' approaches, can yield an understanding of the meaning and interrelationships of the groups or statuses represented".

In the first of four contributions concerned with the Old World, Robert Chapman (Reading) addresses himself to the emergence of formal disposal areas and the problem of megalithic tombs in prehistoric Europe. He argues from an anthropological basis

that "interment in cemeteries or monuments will emerge in periods of imbalance between social and critical resources". The "dialogues with death" contributed by Ian Kinnes (British Museum) revolve around British chambered tombs and have the considerable merit of brevity – presumably because "the overwhelming proportion of information derives from earlier work which was not geared to answer the questions now being posed". Richard Bradley (Reading) reviews the contrasts between the burial patterns perceptible in the British Bronze Age Wessex and Deverel Rimbury core areas in the light of their recently established chronological overlap (which used to be succession). With the significant assistance of contemporary written texts, Klaus Randborg (Copenhagen) summarizes the data on death in the Viking Age of Denmark and relates it to the formation of the Danish State.

Jane E. Buikstra (Evanston) reports the preliminary results of a regionally based study which illustrates both the importance of the spatial dimension of mortuary behaviour and its effects upon the study of prehistoric biology. Two of the earliest (hunter-gatherer) skeletal series from the mid-western United States apparently consist of individuals rendered incapable of "normal" human activities by age or disease. It follows that

the human biologist studying prehistoric remains must be careful not to theorize himself from the source of his data, the mortuary site, or he may generalise too quickly and thus ignore the very variability which will allow him to make precise, predictive statements concerning prehistoric populations.

Finally, Della Collins Cook (Bloomington) discusses dental aspects of the middle Woodland period (second-third centuries AD) in the Lower Illinois Valley.

It will be clear from the above that the theoretical perspectives developed in this book are those of the New (and now rather dated) Archaeology, which was originally designed to generate positions of considerable emolument for those willing to use Haispeak in two fields of traditional archaeological endeavour – society (societal organization) and culture (the dynamics of cultural systems). How new is the body of theory that the editors have undertaken to provide?

The only remotely novel features of this collection that I can see are the assumption that mortuary theory is needed and the implicit denial by the contributors of any theoretical limitations on their knowledge of the past. Of these, the first is not proven and the second is a revival of a degree of optimism that died with the nineteenth century. The triumphant progress from the particular to the general is equally unimpaired. A random example of this terrifyingly naïve strategy must suffice. Brown on the origins of ranking (takes issue with V. Gordon Childe's well-known hypothesis that surplus above subsistence needs was a necessary condition for the emergence of chiefs, and social stratification: "However, the necessary-surplus argument was effectively demolished by the discovery that social rank existed quite independently of a definable surplus (Sahlins 1972). Rankship is not instituted by the work of others (Brunton 1975). The absence of qualification ("could exist"; "is not always instituted") in these sentences is misleading: (Sahlins 1972) is a book called *Stone Age Economics* and (Brunton 1975) is a ten-page article in *Mn* entitled "Why do the Trobrianders have chiefs?" My own view is that social stratification can be "instituted by the work of others"; another anthropologically interesting community, the British Civil Service, traditionally defines one of its emblems of rank as a reward for Other People's Efforts. But as that may, this book has done nothing to convince me that outward achievements of the human mind, imperfectly – that is, archaeologically or anthropologically – perceived, can usefully be investigated like a disease of the human body. After all, clinical opportunities for testing hypotheses are less readily available to

the prehistorian than they are to the medical researcher.

At this point, it is only fair to quote two isolated observations that betray a different attitude to the use of evidence:

The means that states and other societies use to communicate social status, succession etc. by way of funerary practices and memorial stones cannot be derived from any simple archaeological formula. Social changes are certainly reflected in the burial data, but the appearance of change may take a variety of forms according to the cultural milieu. (Randborg.)

... qualifications are lost as the general models develop, and error is compounded as higher levels of opinion are reached. It is the opinion of this writer that a conservative and critical stance is essential when investigating skeletal samples of small size. (Buikstra.)

By the standards prevailing elsewhere in this self-indulgent farrago, these statements are positively mature. So much for the age of this "new" body of theory. Its pathology exhibits all the symptoms of terminal malnutrition, for the tragic reason that its diet of case-studies excludes the Central European and Mediterranean Iron Age and the Near, Middle and Far East – to name only a few of the more obviously vitamin-rich sources of nourishment. Judging from my own experience, practitioners in those areas will find no general principle enunciated here that is both useful and unfamiliar. It is symptomatic that by page 134 (out of 144) we have got no further than "The central fact about archaeological skeletal collections is that they are dead".

I conclude that this puny infant has somehow managed to don the Emperor's New Clothes. This is another way of saying that a new bandwagon is well and truly rolling – a gloomy diagnosis confirmed by the appearance in recent months of two more books on the same theme, and by rumours of yet more forthcoming occasions for moribund interaction.

Domesticated pirates

Gwyn Jones

ELSE ROESDAHL

Viking Age Denmark: Translated by Susan Margeson and Kirsten Williams.
272pp. Colnagade/British Museum Publishing, £16.95.
0 7141 8027 0

We need not seek to be over precise in deciding when historians began to act upon the assumption that our view of the Vikings and the Viking Age was in fact measure unhistorical, because it was based on documents whose authenticity could not be determined, or if determined could not be upheld. But if we settle for the opening decades of our century, and look back to the brothers Curt and Lauritz Weibull in Sweden, we shall not be far astray. They were a hard-hitting pair of the contemporary European tendency to progress from the particular to the general is equally unimpaired. A random example of this terrifyingly naïve strategy must suffice. Brown on the origins of ranking (takes issue with V. Gordon Childe's well-known hypothesis that surplus above subsistence needs was a necessary condition for the emergence of chiefs, and social stratification: "However, the necessary-surplus argument was effectively demolished by the discovery that social rank existed quite independently of a definable surplus (Sahlins 1972). Rankship is not instituted by the work of others (Brunton 1975). The absence of qualification ("could exist"; "is not always instituted") in these sentences is misleading: (Sahlins 1972) is a book called *Stone Age Economics* and (Brunton 1975) is a ten-page article in *Mn* entitled "Why do the Trobrianders have chiefs?" My own view is that social stratification can be "instituted by the work of others"; another anthropologically interesting community, the British Civil Service, traditionally defines one of its emblems of rank as a reward for Other People's Efforts. But as that may, this book has done nothing to convince me that outward achievements of the human mind, imperfectly – that is, archaeologically or anthropologically – perceived, can usefully be investigated like a disease of the human body. After all, clinical opportunities for testing hypotheses are less readily available to

the prehistorian than they are to the medical researcher.

Grave matters

Kenneth Kitchen

JOHN ROMER

Valley of the Kings
293pp. Michael Joseph/Rainbird.
£12.50.
0 7181 2045 0

In the public consciousness, the image of Ancient Egypt consists of a series of limited but strong impressions – of the Pyramids and Sphinx, of mummies and mysterious rock-cut tunnel-tombs, of the treasures of Tutankhamun and of huge temples under a blazing sun.

From the fifteenth to the twelfth centuries BC, as rulers of a vast empire extending from Syria to the northern Sudan, the Egyptian Pharaohs attempted to safeguard their lavish burials by concealing them in tunnel-like tombs cut in a desolate desert valley to the west of the Nile at Luxor, the area of ancient Thebes: in the Valley of the Kings. Even in those times, the tombs were entered and robbed of their wealth; in desperation, priests gathered up the plundered royal bodies, depositing them in a few better-secured groups, leaving the great tombs open and abandoned. These lurid events left their record in papyri of commissions into such tomb-robbing, and in hasty dockets on the coffins and shrouds of the royal bodies.

Some of these vividly decorated tombs came on to the tourist circuit in Greco-Roman times and later were the brief robes of Christian anchorites. They then fell into oblivion until they were rediscovered in modern times by European explorers and later hunted for and studied by archaeologists and Egyptologists, for their treasures, their texts and their information on life and death (at royal level) in Ancient Egypt.

After a succinct summary of the Egyptian setting and of the date, origin and form of the royal tombs, John Romer's work divides into two nearly equal halves – on the explorers and diggers of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and on the organized excavations from the late nineteenth century to the

present, ending with a brief postscript on the current situation.

Having himself served with recording expeditions to Egypt and having supervised the clearing of one of these great tombs, the author has close, first-hand knowledge of the material. The result is a vividly written book containing many details of interest. Many picturesque anecdotes about early adventurers and more recent scholars enliven the narrative for the most casual reader, while for the scholar the illustrations include a variety of rarely featured details and totally fresh items, and otherwise inaccessible facts are embedded in the text. Thus, we now have available the only plan of the peculiar Tomb No. 1, which may have served the family of the formidable Ramses II. We have successive plans of the progress of the excavations of the treasure-lampy T. M. Davis, whose prehistoric publications too often contained the minimum possible of proper record of either tombs or their contents. In need to study the other ancient remains of the royal Valley is clearly brought out – although it must be said (as Romer himself realizes) that the paramount need today is for total and accurate record and full publication of the tombs themselves. Physically, they are under threat from geological and hydrographic shifts – and from antiquity-theft, the pressure of tourists and vandalism. Fortunately, recent decades have witnessed more scholarly interest in the tombs than at any time since the heady days of the finding of Tutankhamun; a modern record has been begun with the series of volumes by Piankoff and Hornum, and one hopes that Romer himself may issue a report on his work in clearing the tomb of Ramses XI. For Egypt's great sites, the crying need remains everywhere the same: a full and accurate record and publication of the standing monuments, and not excavation, except where sites are actually under threat.

In short, Mr Romer's book is authoritative, informative and entertaining throughout. The illustrations are original and the quality of their colour is consistently good.

Aggersborg, in their road-metalling, causeways and sea-defences, their memorials to the mighty dead; their shipbuilding and their house and settlement architecture. And so on: the big things: they are humankind's hundred details: their numbers, the way they lived for breakfast, the containers they imported; what they kept the rain out; what their women wore; bellows, lamps and solder.

Dr Roesdahl would wish to extend to an earlier date the period we call the Viking Age, because certain features, dynastic and constructional, are to be discerned ahead of the decisive year 793 when the Vikings so murderously assaulted the monastery of Lindisfarne in Northumbria. The difficulty is not apparent than real. Most students recognize that there had to be some kind of build-up in Scandinavia before the first recorded raids took place; but inevitably for western Europe and the British Isles the Viking Age began roughly coincidental with the Viking Movement overseas, c.780–1080, and the peoples we now know as Danes, Swedes and Norwegians.

The picture of medieval Denmark that emerges is so rational, so balanced, so consonant with human nature that it looks rather like Viking Denmark with the Vikings left out. It is the people, we ask ourselves, portrayed by Saxo Grammaticus? Are these the kind of Ragnar Hairybreeks? But we should not be too surprised. The Danes (and as such may be said for the Norwegians and Swedes) were only parenthetically pirates, and monsters. There is the redemptive evidence of their art, their homes and domestic virtues, their high regard for their womenfolk. They were skilful and often inspired craftsmen in metal, wood and stone. Year by year we are uncovering fresh evidence of their constructional skills, as in huge ramparts like the Danevirke and the fortress complexes of Pyritz and

Aggersborg; in their road-metalling, causeways and sea-defences, their memorials to the mighty dead; their shipbuilding and their house and settlement architecture. And so on: the big things: they are humankind's hundred details: their numbers, the way they lived for breakfast, the containers they imported; what they kept the rain out; what their women wore; bellows, lamps and solder.

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Perverse effects

Anthony Giddens

RAYMOND BRUDON

The Unintended Consequences of Social Action
232pp. Macmillan, £25.
0 333 25845 2

Paradoxes of consequences have long fascinated students of human behaviour. What we do as human actions may have outcomes quite distinct from those we intend. The main "private vices, public benefits" type way of expressing this phenomenon, became the mainstay of classical economists. The pursuit of self-interest, in the context of a competitive market, supposedly serves the ends of the community as a whole.

In recent years, theories of paradoxical consequences have been strongly influenced by game theory, which indeed is often true to its name in providing puzzles intriguing enough to while away many an hour. Consider a situation in which individual participants, each making rational decisions in respect of their interests, produce consequences which actually run counter to those interests. The most famous example of this is the "prisoner's dilemma" game. In a simplified version, this runs as follows. Two prisoners are in court. They are confronted with certain alternatives: – that a high proportion of students would choose the short-cycle courses if they make rational choices. But, says Boudon, obvious though it may appear, this assumption would be incorrect. If all the students make their decisions in a rational way, they will opt for the longer types of educational course – even though, like the prisoners, they would actually have fared better if they had chosen the shorter type. A perverse effect is at work. I shall not attempt to portray the details of his argument here. But it depends, as does the prisoner's dilemma, upon the fact that each individual is making strategic choices between the same alternatives. As Boudon indicates, that independently of what the others choose, each student has an

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Compound cleavages

Sam C. Nolutshungu

LEONARD THOMPSON and
ANDREW PRIOR
South African Politics
255pp. Yale University Press. £17.50
(paperback, £4.50).
0 300 02767 2

Sixteen years ago, Leonard Thompson published a brief introductory text, *Politics in the Republic of South Africa*, which was reprinted five times in the United States although it had a much more modest impact here. The present work with Andrew Prior, a political scientist at the University of Cape Town, is a successor to that earlier book which also aims to "explain the basic facts concerning the peoples and the economy of South Africa, to show how the system has become what it is, and to analyse the system as it operates today". The authors also claim that their description of the "peculiarities of the South African system" is based on the data and the scholarship of the early 1980s. Since the book is published in 1981-1982 (that is, in an extrajudicial claim), their view of South Africa as a "peculiar", repressive plutocracy for which the Afrikaners are chiefly to blame owes little to recent studies. Much of the work of the last decade and a half has argued that some of the most important features of South Africa which account for the emergence of its unique system of racial domination are by no means peculiar and has tried to renege apartheid systematically to capitalist development and class conflict.

The verdict on the debates on race and class is delivered firmly and briefly by Thompson and Prior: "The major cleavages in South African society are racial rather than class cleavages, and one 'race' labelled white dominates the others." However, they are willing to

make one concession: "There are of course different social classes within each of the four [racial] divisions, based on education, occupation and wealth." That is all they care to say on the matter.

The book contains brief demographic and economic surveys with useful, though familiar, tables; chapters on the "Framework of Political Life", "How the System Works", "Internal Opposition", and "External Opposition". There is a useful summary of the constitution and a brief description of recent constitutional developments. Although the book is non-theoretical, expressions like "interest articulation" and "aggregation" and "socialization" all point to some distant - theoretical inspiration. However, one will find very few new insights and little new knowledge here about how the system works. There is no discussion of the bureaucracy, or the military, or big business, national and foreign, in relation to the "articulation of interests" or, indeed, in any context whatever. There is some reference to the racial composition of the civil service, some random facts are given about two generals and their foreign experience and contacts, and the increasing political involvement of the military in politics is noted.

The discussion of internal opposition is balanced and accurate as far as it goes, but it is little more than a listing of organizations, with only the briefest mention of their nature, policies and activities. The authors rightly stress the severity of repression against those who oppose, and conclude that the changes initiated under the present prime minister are "nothing more than the latest of a long line of manipulative devices" to prolong white power and privilege. They clearly feel that apartheid, with its brutal violation of the most basic human rights, is an outrage requiring international action to end it, though, like most people, they are uncertain whether this can

occur. Sanctions, they believe, could have a serious impact if they were effectively enforced. But the West, with its equivocal attitude towards South Africa, and its preoccupation with the Soviet interest in Southern Africa, is likely to give less than wholehearted support to any such project.

One issue of profound contemporary concern which might have been explored is the obvious advantage that South Africa means to derive from that vague, if ubiquitous, Soviet interest. If it would be to the West's advantage that Soviet influence in Angola and Mozambique should be countered by a more sympathetic Western attitude to those countries, it is decidedly in South Africa's interest that there should be no improvement of relations between the United States and those countries and that, as the principal supporters of the South African liberation movement, they should be driven by military means if necessary, into a total dependence on the Soviet Union. What African and Asian states have claimed for years at the United Nations - that apartheid constitutes a threat to international peace - may, in this regard, become only too evident, creating the need for the West to assert its own interest against the South African one.

As a basic introduction to South African politics the book may serve its purpose. Yet, it would have been more valuable if it had taken more account of recent scholarship. Thompson and Prior have simply disregarded the radical historical approaches that flourished in England in the 1960s and 1970s, and their political science is also curiously outworn. Their bibliographic notes, which are intended to introduce a relevant literature on South Africa, contain so few references to the Marxist and neo-Marxist studies that have dominated the field, and enlivened it, for over a decade as to be misleading.



Nguzi Karl I. Bond, who was three times foreign minister and at the time of his arrest in 1977 prime minister of Zaïre, photographed when in prison. reproduced from his recent book, written and published in French. Mobutu: Ou l'incarnation du Mal Zaïrois (201pp. Rex Collings. Ill. 0 86036 197 7).

Sophiatown style

Dennis Walder

LEWIS NKOSI
Tasks and Masks: Themes and Styles
of African Literature
202pp. Longman. £4.50.
0 582 64146 2

In 1951, a former Springbok fast bowler called Bob Crisp had a good idea: to start a monthly magazine for Africans in South Africa which would, eventually, sell across the entire continent. The magazine would express the black soul: it would contain African poetry, folk tales and extracts from *Cry, the Beloved Country*. When the first issue came out in Johannesburg, white liberals loved it, but the blacks did not. Crisp resigned. One of his backers took over, and persuaded an Oxford friend to join him as editor. The new publisher had no knowledge of publishing: the new editor no knowledge of African life. But Jim Bailey and Anthony Sampson soon had an amazing success on their hands: *Drum* had been born.

The secret of *Drum's* success was simple: its staff was taken from the black ghettos, and they wrote about what life was like there. Brash, tough and cynical, the *Drum* staff represented the new African - urbanized, cut off from his tribal past. They wrote - and lived - intensely. Many have not survived. But they were a remarkable generation, producing some of the best journalism, short stories - and jazz - to come out of Africa. The roll includes Henry Nxumalo, Todd Matshikiza, Can Themba, Biko Mphahlele, Cassy Moseley, Ezekiel Mphahlele, and spotted writing in a Zulu newspaper in Durban in 1953, a promising youngster called Lewis Nkosi.

Nkosi joined the Sophiatown set, sharing the violent and immediate life of the township. In which everybody lived with everybody - white, Chinese, Indian and, mainly, black. Athol Fugard was there, drawn by the talent

and vitality. It was the place for a young writer to be. Nkosi rose to become chief reporter on *Drum*, developing a typically combative style, attacking before you were attacked. Visiting American or European writers (Louis MacNeice was one) were taken to Aunty Suzie's shebeen near Marshall Square, where there was always the possibility that a police raid would provide a first-hand experience of what it was like to be a South African. It was the time of the Defiance Campaign, the last hope for peaceful change. Then came the mass arrests and, finally, Sharpeville. Protest went underground, or abroad. Nkosi was offered a scholarship to study journalism at Harvard, and he joined the growing exodus, although this meant accepting a one-way "exit permit", and exile. All his writings were henceforth banned in South Africa.

Lewis Nkosi has survived. He has established a worldwide reputation as an outspoken commentator on African literature, primarily through journalism and broadcasting. *The Rhythm of Violence*, 1984, set in Johannesburg, was not a success, but it was the first play in English by a black South African for a long time, anticipating the flood of drama produced by the new generation of Soweto in the 1970s. *Home and Exile*, 1965, a collection of essays on personal and literary topics, remains an essential document for anyone interested in African, and especially South African, writing.

More recently, Nkosi has taken up teaching, and he is at present a lecturer in literature at the University of Zambia. He seems to be heading south, and towards respectability, like that other *Drum* exile, Ezekiel (now Eskia) Mphahlele - although the six pages of *Tasks and Masks* devoted to an exposure of the "terrifying" flaws in Mphahlele's *The Wanderer*, 1971, suggest he would prefer to be distinguished from his former colleague, who is now back to South Africa with a post at the University of

the Witwatersrand. But if *Tasks and Masks* is to be taken as an "introductory textbook" for newcomers to the field which it claims to be, then the personal animosity evident in such an exposure is unhelpful. Nkosi wishes the reader of his study of the typical "themes and styles" of African literature to know that he does not pretend to adopt the "innocent eye" of the traditional, "bourgeois" critic. But there is another kind of pretence involved when a demolition job is mounted at such length, and without a hint of the critic's own background and hence *parti pris*.

The chapter in *Tasks and Masks* which deals with Mphahlele's work, "Southern Africa: Protest and Commitment" does however offer a welcome recognition of the talents of Bessie Head - who, as it happens, served her apprenticeship on *Drum's* sister Sunday newspaper, *Post*. Yet, as Nkosi points out, unlike so many other writers from this background she is neither fast-paced, nor politically aware; rather, she reveals in a series of fine novels a "moral fluency", an understanding of the "problems of belonging, of those inter-personal relationships", Nkosi singles out *Mariu*, 1971, for special praise, for its "delicacy of feeling and subtle evocation of character". Fairly traditional criteria too, one might say.

Elsewhere Nkosi is more balanced. He provides judicious, often stimulating, if not very original accounts of some of the important issues - the language "debate", negritude, the role of history - and many of the important works, including full discussions of all three traditional genres, the novel, poetry and drama. He is particularly persuasive on modern African poetry, to which he devotes two substantial chapters. He seems to respond best to those with whom he might most claim kinship, the urban elite, linguistically, culturally self-aware, and liable to be attracted by revolution, although unable or unwilling to participate in it. Racaivo, Rabearvelo

and Rabemamanjaro, cosmopolitan literary critics of serious interest in the criteria by which that literature may be understood, appreciated and judged. Nkosi waxes enthusiastic about Ama Tutuola's modernism, although it is some thirty years since *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* was "placed" thus by European critics unaware of its roots in Yoruba folklore and the living tradition of West Africa. As the Nigerian novelist, dramatist and critic, Kole Omosoko, pointed out three years ago in a long essay, *The Form of the African Novel* (published by Akure in Ibadan), the whole issue of the impact of oral narrative upon African fiction needs to be considered before we can adequately assess its nature and direction. The "classics" of African literature, from *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* to *The African Child*, from *Things Fall Apart* to *A Dance of the Forests*, as well as more recent works such as Ngugi wa Thiong'o's *Devil on the Cross*, all draw inspiration, matter and matter from indigenous oral sources, and cannot any longer be dealt with primarily in relation to the European tradition.

It is Nkosi's abiding strength, however, that his critical eye is derived from the Western tradition. Nobody can deny that African writing owes an enormous debt to the colonial languages and literary forms; even if the time has come to pay off the debt, and it will continue to be important to hear what a critic as deeply informed by the attitudes and concerns of the urban, cosmopolitan culture as Nkosi has to say.

South Africa and Southern Mozambique: Labour, Relations and the Making of a Relationship (London: Macdonald University Press, 1982, 0 2190 083 0) analyses the institution of Mozambican migrant workers in the Transvaal, import trade through the Portuguese territory and Mozambique's privileged position from 1875 to the renewed relations between the two countries in 1974.

Table manners

Anthony Holden

DAVID M. HAYANO
Poker Faces: The Life and Work of Professional Card Players
205pp. University of California Press.
\$17.95.
0 520 04492 4

David M. Hayano is either a cultural anthropologist at the University of California who happens also to be a poker-player, or a poker-player who happens to be a cultural anthropologist at the University of California. Throughout this book he seems as uncertain as the reader where his true loyalty lies. One thing, however, is certain: when, as an anthropologist, he is engaged in studying poker-players Hayano has achieved one of the professional anthropologist's fundamental aims, by himself becoming a fully-fledged and accepted member of the species under his scrutiny. He calls the resulting practice "auto-anthropology".

To any serious student of poker, in *Poker Faces*, the blindingly obvious is all too frequently dressed up in such pseudo-scientific language. I had never before realized, for instance, that the innocent activity in which I indulge every Tuesday night with six other steady-eyed examples of the species *homo sapiens* could be summarized as follows: "Individuals typically make observations of their situation in order to assess what is relevantly happening around them and what is likely to occur. Once this is done, they often go on to exercise another capacity of human intelligence, that of making a choice from among a set of possible lines of response. Here some sort of maximization of gain will often be involved, often under conditions of uncertainty or risk. 'Aw', as my friend Al would say, 'shut up and deal'."

Or again, take what poker-players call "reading" their opponents and their cards. According to Hayano: "Labels for playing styles regulate the quality and quantity of game interactions between competing players and lie at the heart of the conception of poker as a practical exercise in sociocognitive reading." He sees his task as setting the card-rooms of Gardens in their proper sociological context, yet he is never able precisely to define even that. All he does is alter the language in which poker-players, deep-dyed philosophers all, express attitudes and reach conclusions about their business; he adds little to their own sum of human knowledge about what motivates and drives them to choose this way of life to the exclusion of any other. Towards the end of his thesis, Hayano protests that gambling is an area of human activity neglected by his profession, too often filed away under the heading of social deviancy or even psychopathology. Though every gambler would no doubt agree with him, he perhaps protests too much. For the conclusion and academic impedimenta of *Poker Faces* smack much too much of self-justification, of an acknowledgement that all Hayano has done is to codify a somewhat unusual and colourful area of human activity into the jargon of his trade. Do we learn much, for instance, by being told under the subject-heading "Social Organization of the Cardroom" that "peer group criticism at the card table is the major sanctioning agent for social control and for regulating improper behaviour and adhering to general cardroom norms"? In other words: if you drop your cards beneath the table, you may get shot.

The most interesting observation which Hayano makes is that most professional poker-players labour under a suspicion that they should be doing something "worthwhile". He himself confesses that often, especially after a winning streak, he wondered whether to give up his university professorship for the life of a full-time poker player. Yet he devotes an entire agonized (and inconclusive) section to the difficulties of defining the term "professional" poker-player: "he does not consider that the definition might simply be anyone who earns his or her living playing poker".

Hayano should come clean. He is an

intelligent man who enjoys the extra-curricular thrills and intellectual challenges of the poker table, and as an anthropologist saw a rare chance to combine work with pleasure. Only when describing a hand in which he was a participant does his writing come to life. The most interesting section of the entire book - the necessary explanation of how he fetched up in the smoke-filled salons of Gardens rather than the rarified anthropological air of Papua New Guinea - sneaks in only under the Appendix heading "A Description of Fieldwork Methods".

Most heinously, in the view of a fellow poker-player, Hayano the anthropologist constantly uses the terms "poker-playing" and "gambling" as if they were synonymous. His years of field research in Gardens should have told him, if nothing else, that a gambler is a type of poker-player. The fact that you can win regardless of the cards you are dealt, often without even revealing them, removes this particular art from the sordid realms of roulette, horse-racing, the football pools and other such forms of unashamed gambling. If Mr Hayano still cannot grasp this, he is welcome to join our Tuesday game any time he likes.

Summer tales

Timothy d'Arch Smith

PETER ROEBUCK

Slices of Cricket
140pp. Allen and Unwin. £7.95.
0 04 796052 0

BRIAN SCOVELL

Ken Barrington: A Tribute
176pp. Harrap. £7.95.
0 245 53867 4

County Champions

198pp. Heinemann. £7.95.
0 434 98024 2

MIKE BREARLEY

Phoenix from the Ashes: The story of the England-Australia Series 1981
159pp. Hodder and Stoughton. £7.95.
0 340 28088 3

The trouble with cricket books is that there are too many anecdotal in them and three out of four in this batch follow the pattern. Indeed, the author of the book on Ken Barrington has encouraged Barrington's friends to fill half his pages with such stories. Peter Roebuck in his offering of rough male talk from the Somerset dressing-room introduces quite a number, and Corny Champions, an anthology of unashamedly partisan essays on the first-class counties by writers, journalists and cricketers, is equally generous in its ration.

Nevertheless, all three books have something to recommend them to the browser. Mr Roebuck pays respects to his coach, a courtesy often forgotten in cricketers' reminiscences (although John Snow wrote a poem to his). Bill Tidy deserves applause for his frank admission that his county, Lancashire, was responsible for transforming spectators into "a crowd", a beer-swilling, boo-dancing mob. Brian Scovell's biographical section on Barrington is sympathetically and diligently done and there is a useful appendix of Barrington's career figures which shows up a bad mistake in those given by this year's *Wisden*. Barrington, whose batting skills England, at a lean period, required and possibly exploited, was a complex personality not unlike Boycott. Not a fast scorer (he and Boycott were both dropped for slow scoring) Barrington once produced a test innings extraordinarily out of character, hitting 115 of 127 balls in two and a half hours. Curiously, this was when he was at his lowest, ebullient and physically exhausted. Boycott too once played such an innings, although not in a test match. Was he, one wonders, under the same sort of stress?

The person who would have perceived that something was amiss

Wine mysteries

Jancis Robinson

ANTHONY HANSON

Burgundy
378pp. Faber. £12.50 (paperback £4.50).
0 571 11797 X

DAVID PEPPERCORN

Bordeaux
428pp. Faber. £12.50 (paperback £4.50).
0 571 11751 1

Wine, along with home video equipment and running gear, has been one of the few consumer markets to have shown impressive growth over the past five years or so - and publishers have not been slow to take advantage of this. We have seen so many titles (though admittedly *The Jigger's Guide to the Médoc* has yet to appear) that the literate inebriate is now justified in denouncing something genuinely new in each one.

The Fisher series of books on wine, patiently edited by Julian Jeffs, hail,

until the recent publication of volumes on each of the world's most famous wine regions, restricted itself to accepted knowledge from the most impeccable sources in the most detail. With *Burgundy* new ground is broken, not only for Faber but in the literature about this most complex vineyard grouping in general. For years there have been vocal complaints and literary hints about the poor value offered by this famous wine region. Anthony Hanson, who is a wine merchant and Master of Wine, spells it out as never before - in print.

His thesis is that Burgundy offers more disappointments more expensively than any other wine region in the world, whether through ineptitude in the cellar, greed in the vineyard or malpractice in the blending vat. A look down the contents page leaves the reader in no doubt that he must be to be split in chapters headed "The Development of AC Legislation, or The Buyer is Still Deceived" and "Magician's Hands". The first half of the book is devoted to a scholarly (and in some cases sensational) explanation of setting and methods in the ancient tudy, while the second half consists of a detailed survey of 350 growers and merchants clustered on a geographical survey of the whole region, from Chablis to Beaune.

Hanson's most pointed accusations concern the red wines of Burgundy's heart, the Côte d'Or, and were formulated as a result of his three years working there, in the late 1960s and early 1970s. But this book has been completed and published soon after his return, the Burgundians would have been forced to accept all his criticisms as shamefully valid. But *Burgundy* has been a painfully slow labour of love and the inhabitants of Beaune and Nuits-St-Georges may now content themselves that some things at least have improved since they were subjected to Hanson's scrutiny. It is also sad that he has been swept away by this fit of acerbic zeal over Burgundy's sins, however salutary,

that he all but ignores the region's irreplaceable gifts to connoisseurs around the world.

Burgundy may be far from a celebration of good things, but it does convey an enormous amount of informed opinion and conscientious, detailed knowledge not available elsewhere, especially on vineyard ownership (though the really demanding reader might wish that Hanson's approach was as subjectively critical in Part Two as Part One).

Hanson needed only courage and tenacity in offering something new in *Burgundy*; the writer on such well-described ground as *Bordeaux* faces a much stiffer task. David Peppercorn, another wine merchant and Master of Wine, is as equal to it as any, and has wisely decided to capitalize on his twenty-five years in the upper echelons of the wine trade and a tasting experience that goes back to his father's table. After a useful trot around vineyards and cellars, we are taken on a chateaux tour of the region, lingering as most have done before in the Médoc, hurling through St Emilion and Pomerol and almost ignoring the basic appellations we can all afford to buy. Our guide's formula of concentrating on history and tasting notes means that he makes the most of his own academic training and the lessons of his wonderfully practised palate but may leave some wanting to know more about the individual quirks of each property's approach to vine-growing and wine-making. With its concentration on the best chateaux and the ancient villages, *Bordeaux* is certainly a celebration of good things, but the disadvantage of its format is that it makes certain omissions - details of AC laws, or Pierre Coste, the white wine innovator, for example - inevitable.

Those looking for a soothing draught are recommended to Peppercorn's handsome work on Bordeaux, while those in need of a bracing tonic should tackle Hanson's brave analysis of Burgundy.

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